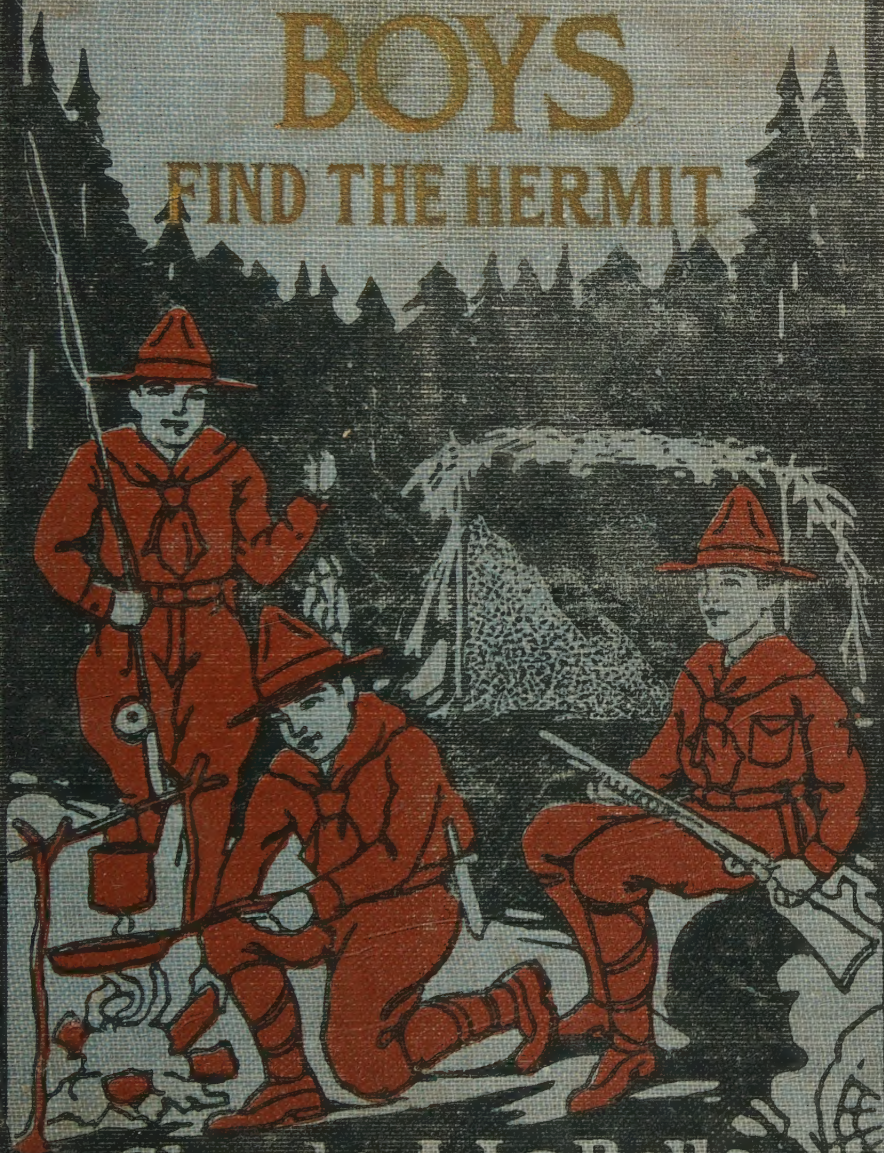


THE RANGER BOYS

FIND THE HERMIT




Claude A LaBelle

To Robert-

From

Grandma Heiner

Xmas 1924



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"The pines snapped like giant crackers. Trees burst into flames, and finally the fire swept over them."
(*The Ranger Boys Find the Hermit*)

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THE RANGER BOYS FIND THE HERMIT

By CLAUDE A. LABELLE

AUTHOR OF

*"The Ranger Boys to the Rescue," "The Ranger Boys
and the Border Smugglers," "The Ranger Boys
Outwit the Timber Thieves," "The Ranger
Boys and Their Reward."*



A. L. BURT COMPANY
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THE RANGER BOYS SERIES

A Series of Stories for Boys 12 to 16 Years of Age

By CLAUDE A. LABELLE

The Ranger Boys to the Rescue

The Ranger Boys Find the Hermit

The Ranger Boys and the Border Smugglers

The Ranger Boys Outwit the Timber Thieves

The Ranger Boys and Their Reward

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THE RANGER BOYS FIND THE HERMIT

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THE RANGER BOYS FIND THE HERMIT.

CHAPTER I.

PROMISE OF NEW ADVENTURES.

"WHEW," sputtered Garry Boone as he dashed into the shack, followed by a gust of wind and rain. "This is one of the worst rainstorms that we've had since we signed up as Rangers. This is the third day, and there isn't a sign of a let-up. I move we have supper immediately. There's wood and water for the night and for breakfast, so let's turn to and have a squirrel pie. Phil, it's your turn to do the cooking. Dick, this has been your lazy day. According to our program for rainy weather, we take turns cooking and providing wood and water. Tomorrow, however, I'll cook, Phil will loaf, and you will have the pleasant job of going to the spring and the woodpile. Nice time you'll have, too, if the wind holds on as it did today. I had all I could

do to fight my way back. The only thing that I'm afraid of is that this gale will play havoc with our telephone lines on the section, so as soon as the storm is over, I think we should send out a patrol and test all the lines. There will be no danger of fire for a few days, as it will take a lot of hot sun to dry out the forest after the wetting it has had, and that will give us time to repair any possible lines, so we will be ready as soon as the wood dries to tinder the way it was the last couple of weeks."

Garry ceased talking and threw himself into a bunk and began to read a pamphlet on Forest Conservation and Protection. Dick was engaged in cleaning and oiling the rifles that made up the armament of the trio of Rangers, and Phil was already at work starting the necessary business of providing the evening meal.

While they are thus engaged, let us devote a few minutes to telling who the Ranger Boys are, and how they happen to be in the Big Woods of Maine.

Those of our readers who read "The Ranger Boys to the Rescue," are already acquainted with Garry Boone, Dick Wallace and Phil Durant. For those who haven't, some explanation is necessary. The three boys already mentioned were schoolmates in a small Maine town near Portland, the largest city in the state. At the graduation exercises, they find that they are facing a parting of the ways. They

had finished their junior year, and had expected to graduate together. However, Garry's father was a wealthy timber and mill owner, and he decided that Garry should go to a military school for a year, preparatory to taking the entrance examinations for West Point.

This meant that Dick Wallace would go with him, for Mr. Boone was Dick's guardian. There was a mystery connected with Dick, that very few people were acquainted with. His mother had died when he was born, and his father was a professor of botany and natural history in an Eastern University. The professor and Mr. Boone had been classmates at college, and kept up a lively friendship after they had left their old Alma Mater. Then one day when Dick was still very young, his father had been thrown from his horse while out riding, and sustained a severe injury, causing him to lose his memory. Then, before steps could be taken to have surgeons attempt a cure, he had disappeared, and had never been heard from again.

Mr. Boone had taken Dick and given him a home, treating him as a son, and so Dick and Garry had grown up together. The third boy, Phil Durant, was the son of a storekeeper in very moderate circumstances. The friendship of the three had started during their grammar school days, and had grown stronger with the passing years. Now the three

are inseparable and were often referred to by their schoolmates as "The Three Musketeers." Unfortunately, Mr. Durant was not able, financially, to send Phil to the Military Academy, hence the prospect was that the old companionship would be soon a thing of the past.

During the graduation exercises, Phil pitched the school ball team to victory over their greatest rivals, and a baseball scout offered him a position in a minor league, intending to have him consider professional baseball seriously. This, Phil had decided against.

During a conversation with the pitcher of the opposing team, he told them he planned to spend his summer camping in the Adirondack Mountains, and this gave the three chums an idea. They wanted to spend their last summer together, and Garry suggested that they obtain his father's permission to camp on some of Mr. Boone's land back in the hinterland of Maine.

The chums had a shack on the river that ran near their home town, and paddled up to it to get their supper. When they arrived there they found it in possession of some tramps. Garry and Phil were captured by the tramps, but Dick escaped and paddled down the river after help. On the way he ran into a snag that wrecked the canoe, and he was forced to finish the remaining distance by swimming.

Dick was a fat youth, and like most heavy people was as agile as a fish in the water. He succeeded in bringing back help, and the tramps were captured. It turned out that the men were wanted for a series of burglaries of postoffices and railroad stations in nearby towns, and Garry, Dick and Phil, came in for a share of the reward, amounting to five hundred dollars apiece.

When they broached the plan of spending the summer in the woods to Mr. Boone, he made a counter-suggestion that they hailed with delight. His proposal was that instead of merely camping for the summer, with the prospect of finding time drag on their hands after a few weeks, that they act as Forest Rangers on one of his properties in the state.

Mr. Boone explained the Ranger Service, which consists of a number of lookout men and patrolmen, who are scattered about the forest lands of the state to discover and report forest fires. This service is maintained equally by the state and the timber owners. Garry's father proposed that they take over a small section he owned, and he would use his influence to have them created an Extraordinary Unit of the Service. Of course their youth would have prevented them from being full fledged Rangers, but Mr. Boone was a power in the state and could have them become attached something after the manner of freelances to the Service.

This was better than the boys had hoped for, and some days were spent in outfitting for the summer's work. In their many talks before setting out for the Big Woods, they expressed the hope that they would meet with some sort of adventures, but had no idea that these would extend beyond hunting adventures, or a possible fire. They had no idea that they would meet with the happenings they encountered during the first days of their sojourn in the virgin forests.

Almost at the outset they made an enemy of a halfbreed named Jean LeBlanc. LeBlanc, who was nicknamed the "Bear," was half French and half Indian, and had a fancied grievance against Mr. Boone. When the boys reached Millinocket, where they procured their food supplies, the manager of the store, not knowing that LeBlanc's vengeance might be extended to the son of the man he believed had injured him, advised the boys to hire the halfbreed to help them tote their supplies to the woods shack where they were to make their headquarters.

All went well until the last night of the trek, when Garry awoke to find LeBlanc had knocked out Sandy, their big Airedale, and made off with all their food. They gave chase and captured him. The guide went off muttering vengeance in the French language, which Phil understood as well as he understood English.

Arriving at the cabin, Dick had an amusing adventure with a bear. They turned out to hunt for it the next day, and discovered that it was only a cub. A peculiar thing about it was that it had a home-made rope collar about its neck, and was apparently quite tame. While they were playing with it, a full grown bear attacked them, which was shot by Dick.

A day or two later, they found themselves confronted with a real mystery in the shape of a note, written in charcoal on a piece of birch bark, warning them to beware of Jean LeBlanc, and thanking them for being kind to the little cub. The mysterious note was signed with no name, but with a sort of a cryptogram, representing a lone pine tree with a boulder, marked with a great X, standing near it.

The mysterious stranger had also taken the pelt of the bear that Dick had shot, promising to cure it and return it. The chums arrange to take turns in the lookout cabin on the top of the mountain and on the patrol, one boy and Sandy staying on lookout duty, while the other two boys made the patrol.

On their first patrol, they find a party of campers from New York on the river bank. This river ran along one side of the section that they were to patrol. The camping party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Graham, their grown daughter Margaret, a

little daughter called Patty, one Wally Kirkudbright, a colored cook, and a Maine guide by the name of Silas Peabody.

In the meantime, the boys had made a fast friend of an old guide named Nate Webster, who had been a friend of Garry's father. Returning to the cabin one day after a patrol, they found that their supplies had been stolen. Again the mysterious note writer left a birchbark note telling them LeBlanc had been the thief.

The chums decide to go to the New Yorker's camp and buy from them enough supplies to last them until they could arrange to have food brought from Millinocket. Arriving at the river bank, just above some dangerous rapids, they see little Patty in a runaway canoe. They save her from probable death in the rapids, and earn the everlasting gratitude of the Grahams. They are given supplies and return home. Then they add another enemy to their list. The Deputy Ranger of that district, by name Anderson, had procured his job through some political influence, and was thoroughly incapable of exercising the duties of a Ranger Deputy. He gives them a calldown for leaving the patrol, even though they explain the theft of the food, and insinuates that they are coloring their story of LeBlanc's enmity. He further says he will take steps to have them removed from duty. Later, he himself is re-

moved and Nate Webster is put in his place. Anderson blames the boys for the loss of his job after he finds that Garry is the son of Mr. Boone, owner of considerable land in that vicinity. As a matter of fact, the boys had nothing to do with it, but Anderson promises to "get them."

Things go quietly for a short time until one evening a strange guide comes and tells them that little Patty Graham has disappeared and the family have asked that they come and help in the search. This the chums gladly do and as it is rainy weather, all join the search. According to the rules of the Ranger Service, the boys need not remain on duty during bad weather, as when the woods are wet, there is no danger of fires.

Hours are spent scouring the woods, but no trace is found of the little girl, and the parents are grief-stricken. Then comes another note from the mysterious writer, whom the boys have decided is a hermit living somewhere in that vicinity. The note states that Jean LeBlanc has kidnapped the child, and winds up with a veiled allusion to the North Star and Twin Trees.

This note the boys show the guides and they set off down the river to a place where Jean LeBlanc is supposed to have a hidden shack. The Ranger Boys attempt to have the party split, some going up

the river, and some down, but are laughed at by the guides.

As the acknowledged leader of the trio, Garry decides to obey a hunch and go North, since the allusion to the North Star evidently is a hint. Garry's idea is that somewhere along the river they will find two trees that bear some resemblance to each other, and there they will find the start of the trail that will lead them to Patty and LeBlanc.

After a long day's paddle they come to a place where a brook enters the river, and there, standing like sentinels, one on either bank, are two pines that resemble each other closely. They divide, each Ranger taking a section, and search. Garry at last comes to a cabin, and thinking it is empty approaches it and falls into a cleverly constructed pit, losing consciousness as he falls. When he comes to, he finds himself bound, and a prisoner of the treacherous LeBlanc. Little Patty is there also, tied hand and foot. LeBlanc goes out to get a muskrat for supper and while he is gone, Garry, working feverishly, manages to burn the ropes that bind him, severely scorching his wrists and hands at the same time. When LeBlanc returns, Garry fells him with a blow on the head, making him a prisoner.

Garry is joined by Phil, later by Dick, and they return to the Graham camp with the halfbreed as

prisoner and Little Patty all safe and sound. They refuse Mr. Graham's insistent offer of a reward, and return to their cabin.

The Grahams, who were upset by the kidnapping of Patty, break camp and return to New York. The chums then settled down to a quiet week, believing that with Anderson no longer Deputy, and with Le-Blanc a captive, they will be no longer molested and have no more stirring adventures.

They are visited by Nate Webster and a guide named White who bring them a present from the Grahams. This present proves to be a complete and compact wireless telephone outfit.

After having thus told of the first adventures of the Ranger Boys, let us return to them, where they are busily engaged in making away with the squirrel pie.

Their meal was interrupted by hearing a shout in the distance. Both Phil and Garry ran to the door.

"I'll bet that's Nate Webster," shouted Dick, and sure enough it proved to be the old guide, or to give him his proper title, Deputy Ranger Nathaniel Webster.

CHAPTER II.

WIRELESS TELEPHONES.

THE trio greeted Nate exuberantly, for they were always glad to see the old guide. He could always give them advice on forest life, for he was skilled in the lore of the woods. Then, too, he could always be counted on for an entertaining story or two, for, like all New England natives, especially those from the forest or seacoast parts of Maine, he could spin a yarn in great fashion.

"Draw up and have a bite to eat," said Garry as he went to fetch another plate and cup.

"Should say I would. Made here from Millinocket in a day and half, and that is stepping some for an old man like me."

The boys agreed that it was some hiking.

When the meal was concluded Nate asked:

"Got that wireless contraption White and I brought you fixed up yet?"

"No," answered Garry. "To tell the truth, Nate, we haven't really had time, but are going to set it up as soon as possible. It's a great thing to be able

to telephone into the lookout shack without having to walk perhaps for miles to reach a 'phone line."

"I've heard tell of those things, but I never knew much about them. Of course, I've heard of wireless telegraphy, but this wireless 'phone is something new. How does the tarnal thing work, anyway?"

Garry was fairly expert in radio telegraphy, and had read and studied considerably about the wireless 'phone.

"The wireless 'phone is not as new as one would think, in fact experiments were conducted on it a little before wireless telegraphy, but the telegraph seemed to be the most valuable commercially, hence the greater amount of experimenting was done on the telegraph.

"The principle is simple," continued Garry. "You know if you throw a stone into a pond, how the ripples will be sent out in ever widening circles. It is just the same if one sends the human voice or the dots and dashes of a telegraph in the air. The sound vibrations spread through the air in great circles just as the ripples spread after the stone is thrown.

"That is the entire principle of the wireless telephone or telegraph," concluded Garry.

"Where do you get the power to run this thing?" quizzed Nate.

"For a central station, a small battery of $22\frac{1}{2}$ volts, worth about \$2.25, is sufficient to do good work," answered Garry. "This one that we have is designed especially and all the parts are as small as it is possible to have them and get good service. For instance, the antennae standard is made of aluminum and is collapsible so that it may be carried."

"I was reading in the papers the other day that they have a wireless place in New York where one can hold a receiver and hear ship orchestras way out at sea playing," remarked Nate.

"Yes, I read the same article. The time will come when one may have concert music in every home any evening one wants it, when a municipal organ and orchestra will play in a room where there will be a transmitter connected with hundreds of 'phones in as many different homes," remarked Garry.

"Sho, you don't say so. Well, I guess I won't live to see it," said Nate.

"Indeed you will," broke in Garry. "Wireless telephony has made great strides even in the past three years, and in ten years it will have accomplished wonders."

From wireless the talk switched to hunting, and Nate regaled them with stories of his early days in the big woods, when moose and caribou were plen-

tiful and shot at will, instead of being zealously guarded as at the present time by the state game commission.

"You know I wish we could capture a bear cub 'live and tame him for a pet around the place," remarked Phil.

"Well, it can be done," Nate surprised them by answering. "If you fellows get up early in the morning I'll set a trap for you and see if we can't bag a bruin."

"Why, how can you do it?" asked Phil.

"You wait until morning and I'll tell you all about it. Just now I'm plumb tuckered out, and I want to crawl in one of those bunks and go to sleep. I've got to be off fairly early in the morning, so you chaps had better tumble into bed and get up with the break of day."

Nate banked the fire for them, and then all rolled in their blankets and were soon fast asleep.

Dick, who was subject to nightmares, startled and then entertained them in the middle of the night by waking and shouting.

When they had thoroughly awakened him, he told them he had dreamed that a lot of bears had caught him in a trap and were trying to teach him to do tricks.

"I don't know as I want to catch a bear after all,

if they feel the way I did in my dream when they are made captives," he said.

"Go on back to sleep. It will all look different in the morning," laughed Garry, and soon all were soundly slumbering again.

CHAPTER III.

CATCHING A BEAR.

"HEY, fellows, tumble out if you want me to help you trap a b'ar," Nate shouted. The boys rubbed the sleep from their eyes and soon were up and preparing the breakfast. Nate had already put the coffee on to boil, and soon the bacon was sizzling, while the old guide made biscuit in the mouth of the flour bag. The boys watched him wide-eyed, for there are few people who can perform this stunt without caking up half the flour in the bag into a paste. Nate skillfully wet enough flour slowly and soon had the biscuits baking over the hot coals.

"How are we going to go about getting this bear, Nate," asked Garry. "We haven't a trap, and we won't want a dead-fall since we want this bruin to be taken alive and unharmed."

"Leave that to me," replied the old guide. "In

the first place even if you had a trap I wouldn't be a party to using it, for there is nothing so pitiful as a bear caught in one of those wicked steel-toothed traps. If it was a panther or a wildcat, or something like that, I wouldn't mind a trap, but I hate the pesky things."

"But many trappers use all kinds of snares and traps," interrupted Phil.

"Sure they do, but that's no reason why I should. Most of those fellows are professional trappers and make a living out of the furs they get, and they are calloused to any kind of animal suffering. Personally, I don't like it and won't do it. I'll go huntin' and put a well aimed bullet into an animal, provided I need it for meat, but I cannot see the use of going out huntin' just to kill something. That's just a whim of mine, but there are lots of old timers like myself who feel the same way; then of course, there are others who don't care what they do. I didn't mean to preach a sermon, but anyway, traps are out of the question since you want this fellow taken alive so as to try and tame him. After breakfast I'll show you what to do."

The sun had broken through the clouds and gave promise of a long spell of fair weather. The woods were still drenched with the rain of the preceding days however, and so the boys would have another day or so before they would be forced to resume

their duties on the lookout and on the long patrols around the border of the section that they guarded. Then there were the 'phone lines to investigate, and that, coupled with the fact that Nate would have to start almost immediately on his hike back to Milinocket, would cause them to hurry.

They ate their breakfast rapidly, chattering merrily the meanwhile, and plying Nate with questions as what method he was going to use to catch Mr. Bruin for them.

"I ain't agoin' to catch him for you, I'm just going to show you what to do and then you catch him yourself. I've got to make home in mighty quick time, and won't have time to stay for such foolishness as catching a b'ar. Not that I wouldn't like to stay and help you, been a long time since I did such a thing, but I just ain't got time."

After breakfast Nate took command of the party.

"Now fust thing you want to do is to take two or three candles and melt 'em up in a pan. Then take and cut a piece of one of those lassos."

"What's the melted candle for?" inquired Dick.

"That's to grease your rope with, to take the human scent off," replied the old guide. "A b'ar has a mighty keen sense of smell and he'll be too suspicious to touch it if you leave traces around your snare."

This was promptly done and then the rope was

carefully laid aside, after Nate had warned them not to touch it again without wearing gloves that had also been greased; in fact, not to touch anything connected with the proposed capture without first putting on gloves.

"Now you boys will have to sacrifice that piece of ham I brought you if you want your b'ar, that is unless you want to postpone catching him till you can snare a rabbit or something. These woods are going to dry out pretty quick and you'll have to be back on the job, so you better use the ham."

The boys immediately voted to forego fried ham in favor of a pet, and not waste time trapping a rabbit. Nate next asked the chums to direct him to the place where they had shot the big bear some time before.

"You see, that seems to be a natural watering place for animals," Nate told them, "and that's where you will eventually get your b'ar if you get him at all. There ain't so many bears in this neck o' the woods as there used to be, but then you can't go very far in the big woods without finding signs of 'em somewhere."

When they had arrived at the watering place, Nate immediately began to inspect the ground nearby. Finally his keen eyes caught sight of what he proclaimed was a natural trail to the spring.

"Unless my eyes have gone back on me and I've

forgotter all I ever knew about trackin' and sign readin', this trail would eventually lead us to a b'ar cave somewhere. Now we'll follow along a little ways and see what we can find," and Nate led the way into the forest.

After a few minutes of walking, they came to a slight clearing, and here the old guide found what he was looking for, a slender, but tough sapling.

"I think this is about what we want," he said. Of course, you could use a pit, but that is a pretty big job. You know a pit would have to be dug pretty deep to hold a b'ar in it, and then you would have a tolerable hard job in getting him out."

"What's the proper way to construct a pit trap?" asked Dick. "I think I know, but I want to see if I have the right idea."

"You'd know if you fell into Jean LeBlanc's trap the way I did that day I found his cabin near the Twin Trees," said Garry with a laugh.

"Yes, sir," agreed Nate Webster. "I hate the sight of that pesky 'breed,' but I have to give him credit for knowing about all there is to be known about woodcraft and trapping. That's the Indian in him. Well, the proper way to set about making a trap is this. First you do just as we've done now, find a place where you think the b'ar will come ambling along on the way to water or to his cave."

"Do you put the trap right in the natural path?" broke in Dick.

"Certainly," replied the old man tartly. "You didn't expect to put it over in the next county did you? As I said, you find the path, and then you dig considerable of a hole. As a matter of fact, you don't often use such a trap for bears, unless you want 'em for a circus or a zoo or something, most people use a deadfall. After you've dug your hole, you build a sort of a trap door out of saplings. This is propped up at one end of the hole, one end lying flush on the ground, the other edge being held up by two sticks. Then you lay a few saplings across the opening, and cover these with light brush, sprinkling dirt and pine needles over the whole thing until it looks as much like ground as you can make it. Now you fix cord so that it will run from the bottoms of the sticks that prop your cover with to the sapling that runs under your bait. Then put your bait, tied of course, if you use live bait, on the trap. Of course you have worn gloves all the time you were working, and then you take a branch and brush away the trail that you have left for some little distance. Then you go on home about your business and bye and bye, your bear comes along, gets mighty curious about that bait and after he sniffs and sniffs and thinks it over and talks with himself b'ar fashion, he decides that

he wants to know all about it and goes after it. Then the light, false ground that you have made gives away, the bear tumbles in, and breaking the sapling to which is tied the cords that hold your trapdoor supports, pulls the door down, and there's your b'ar for you."

"Don't you think that is what we ought to do here?" asked Garry.

"No, indeed," replied Nate decidedly. "Fust place you would have to dig a mighty big pit for a b'ar, such a trap is generally used for smaller game, and then it would take too consarned long, and we haven't all kinds of time to do the job in. Matter of fact, I don't think much of the plan that I'm going to try, but it's as good a way as any, so here's where we start."

Putting on a pair of gloves, Nate borrowed Garry's hatchet, and going to a spot where two sturdy saplings grew close together, lopped off the top of it, leaving a little more than six feet standing. Then he trimmed away the few branches flush to the trunk, leaving only one piece of branch about four inches long attached.

Next, following his directions, Phil climbed up the sapling that grew nearby, and as he neared the top, threw his weight towards the sapling that Nate had trimmed. This of course, caused the sapling to bend, and the other boys caught it and held it as

Phil's weight pulled it to the ground. The bent sapling was then shoved under the little piece of branch that Nate had left, and was held securely from flying back. While Dick held the sapling in place so that it could not release itself while the others were working on it, Nate securely tied the ham to the bent sapling, near the stud that held it down.

"Pretty near finished, now," commented the old guide. "Only thing left to do is to fix the rope that's going to catch the b'ar, or rather, that we hope is going to catch him. Now let's have that piece of lasso that you greased with the paraffine."

The length of lariat was handed over to him, and he made a slip noose in it, and adjusted a noose about a foot and a half in diameter. This was laid on the ground directly under the bait, and then the loose end was drawn up and attached to the bent sapling. Following this, the noose on the ground was carefully covered with moss and pine needles, the traces of the trail made by the party were obliterated, and the "hitch-up" trap was completed.

"Now she's all set and waitin'," announced Nate. "This is what is supposed to happen. The b'ar comes along, thinks it over, and then decides he'll have ham for dinner. When he tackles the ham, the force will be just sufficient to jar the bent sapling loose from that little stud that's holding it

down. Then your sapling flies back, the noose tightens around his legs, and he's left there hanging till you come and get him."

"Why, that's simple," said Dick. "All we've got to do now is wait for the bear to come along and get himself caught."

"Not so very simple," corrected Nate. "I tell you the truth when I say I haven't much hopes of its succeeding. Same trouble as with the pit, it's generally used for smaller animals, but there's a chance of your getting a b'ar. If it's a small b'ar, not full grown, that gets into your trap, your chances are better because he won't be able to free himself as well as a big feller might. Then there's another thing. You can see this spot from the lookout and get here pretty quick to capture him, before he has much time to think it over and try and get away. Now let's clear out and give it a chance."

"Are you heading back for Millinocket?" asked Phil.

"No, changed my mind," replied Webster. "Been thinking it over, and decided that since I am up this way I'll strike off across the woods and pay a visit to the other lookout Ranger on the section adjoining yours to the west. Then I can come back this way and have another chat with you and see what luck you had with the trap."

They returned to the cabin, from where Nate

started on his hike to the other section. The boys talked over the prospects of getting a b'ar, as Nate called it, and then Garry devised a plan for watching.

"We don't have to keep watch in the lookout as regular duty, but it's the best way to see if the trap works. I move we take turns staying in the 'tin can' and if anyone sees anything through the glass, let him fire three shots from the rifle. Then the two in the cabin can start immediately for the 'hitch-up' and the lookout can join them as soon as possible."

"Supposing nothing happens today, but does when two of us are on a patrol?" inquired Dick.

"Well, in that case, I think it would be all right if the lookout left for a while and went and did the job himself. Of course, it would be harder, but any one of us ought to be able to effect the capture."

This was decided on and Garry drew the first turn in the lookout on the top of the hill. Several hours passed and nothing was heard from the top of the hill. The watch had been changed for the third time, and Dick was acting as sentinel.

"Guess the whole thing has been love's labor lost," remarked Garry. He and Phil were playing checkers to pass the time away.

"I don't know, Rome wasn't built in a day you know," replied Phil. "It's your move."

"Well, the only reason I expected something would happen today if at all was because of the good weather. Our friend the bear ought to be coming out after some blueberries."

He had no sooner finished speaking when both boys heard three sharp reports from a rifle.

"Here we go!" shouted Garry. "Dick has sighted something."

CHAPTER IV.

LE BLANC AGAIN.

DURING the time the boys had been waiting a possible signal from the lookout, they had prepared implements for capturing the bear. Of course, there would be a probable need for their lariats, but the most important tool was a device fashioned by Garry. This consisted of a pole about six feet long. Through one end, using the punch-like drill on his Scout knife, Garry bored a hole. Then half-way up the pole and again at the end that was not bored, he attached small nooses after the manner of the metal loops on a fishing rod. These were greased with paraffine, in order that a rope might run through them freely.

The last step was to run a rope through these loops and through the hole bored at the end of the stick. In this free cord a noose was made. "You see," Garry explained, "a blow from a bear's paw is nothing to be laughed at, and can easily knock a person out. Now with this device, we can reach out and drop the noose over some portion of Mr. Bear's body, then pull the cord. This will cause the noose to tighten snugly against the hole I bored, and there you have the bear held tightly, yet you can keep him at a safe distance."

"Fine idea," commented Dick, who was with him at this moment. "I can only suggest one improvement."

"And what might that be," inquired Garry.

"My idea is to have two of these, then with two people pulling in opposite directions, you can make the bear go in almost any direction you wish," explained Dick.

"Suggestion accepted," promptly answered Garry, and he set about making a duplicate of the "pole-noose" as he called it.

Immediately on hearing the agreed signal, the two chums dashed for the "hitch-up trap."

"It will be several minutes before Dick can join us," said Garry as they ran, "so we'll start making the capture as soon as we can get there." "Righto," agreed Phil, and they stopped all conversation, sav-

ing their breath for the task they knew awaited them on coming to the trap.

They arrived just in time, for they saw that the bear, which was little more than a cub, had succeeded, by his squirming and threshing about, had managed to free its feet from the noose. It had been enabled to do this, because of the paraffine on the noose. The boys inwardly resolved that the next time they tried to use a "hitch-up" trap, they would find some other means of destroying the human scent.

"We've got to work fast," panted Phil, "or else all our labor will have gone for nothing." They dashed toward the bear with their pole nooses extended, hoping to catch him before he could make a getaway. However, the bear, instead of running away, began to climb a good sized tree, clumsily, but nevertheless swiftly. In a short time he was half-way up the tree, probably laughing, bear fashion, at the thought of having outwitted these strange beings that were trying to attack him.

"Now what are we going to do?" lamented Phil.

"Go after him," briefly responded Garry. "I don't intend to let that fellow get away now that we're so near to getting him."

"Now Phil, you are the better climber, so you make tracks up that tree; you'll have to work fast, so as to get above the bear, then you can drop your

lariat over him and push him down to where I can get a noose over him. It ought to be dead easy. You'll have to depend on your lariat, because the pole noose would interfere with your climbing. Now then, hop to it."

Slipping his coiled lariat over his arm, Phil drew it snugly against his shoulder so that it would not hamper him in his climb up the tree, yet would be easily accessible when he should need it.

Phil was an experienced climber, and he "shinned" up the trunk until he came to the branches, then the going was easier. Meanwhile, the bear had crawled out on one of the big branches, and was awaiting the next step in their exciting game. As Phil drew up on a level with the bear, the animal began to crawl in toward the trunk, meaning to go higher.

"Keep him from climbing," shouted Garry. "Break off a branch, Phil, and beat him back."

Phil hastened to obey this suggestion, and breaking off a piece of branch, gave the bear a sharp rap on the nose. The bruin grunted, as he felt the blow on his tender nose. The climber now made haste to get higher up the tree, and soon was ten feet above the bear. Here he ensconced himself on a stout limb, and looking down at his quarry, said, "Well, bear, here we are; now it's my move."

Phil unloosened his lariat and adjusted the noose.

Having done this he attempted to lower it around Bruin's neck. This proved to be easier to think about than do, for the bear, with a dexterous flip of his paw, sent the noose flying. A dozen times he repeated this manoeuvre successfully, then, evidently deciding that it was about time to teach the persistent thing above him that it was time to quit, crawled in towards the trunk, and began climbing up toward Phil.

"Stop him!" shouted Garry. "Stand on his head! Step on him!" Phil, however, needed no advice, for he had no intention of letting the bear come up and do battle with him in his insecure position. As Bruin nearly reached the boy, he reached up a paw, and made a slash at Phil's foot as it dangled over the bough on which he was perched. Luckily, the heavy shoe-pack saved his foot, but the force of the blow almost made him lose his balance and fall from his insecure position.

"That's about enough from you, old top," said Phil with a grin, as he cautiously reached out his foot and gave the bear another sharp tap on the nose. There is probably no more tender portion of a bear's anatomy than his snout, and the animal squealed, and began rubbing his nose vigorously with one paw.

However, the climb was his undoing, for Phil, seizing a moment when the bear was off his guard,

dropped the noose over the animal's head, and drew it tight, but not tight enough to choke, then choosing a spot where there was a clearway to the ground, he dropped the coiled lariat, which unrolled as it fell.

"Grab it, Garry, and pull down," shouted Phil to his excited chum on the ground below. Garry did as Phil directed, and Phil, breaking off another branch, started the bear on his downward trip. The animal made several ineffectual attempts to cast off the noose that was cutting off his wind, then gave up the attempt and started swiftly down the tree, evidently deciding to go the way of least resistance and possibly thinking he would stand more chance on the ground.

At this moment, Dick dashed into view. His advent was welcomed by Garry, who directed him to grab one of the pole-nooses and as soon as the bear came within reaching distance to slip it over one of his hind paws. Garry, in the meantime, seized the second pole, which he intended to fasten over a front paw, thus giving three holds on the bear. Just at this point, the bear came within reaching distance, and the nooses were promptly attached. Phil dropped to the ground, and ran to aid Garry, who was having his hands full in trying to keep hold of both the pole and the lariat end. Phil grabbed the lariat, and soon the bear was stretched on the ground, hopelessly captive.

"Whew!" panted Garry, "that was some job, but we've got him hard and fast. We'll rest a minute for the hardest part of the day is yet to come, that is, persuading our friend to come with us."

Garry's prediction was true. After a rest, the pole-noose was slipped from the bear's hind leg, and readjusted about his neck. The same procedure was followed with the other pole, and then the trio started for the cabin. It was a hard struggle, for time and again the bear attempted to go in a direction of his own choosing, then finding this unsuccessful, would squat down on his haunches and refuse to budge an inch. Only repeated haulings on the ropes would start him off again.

"I say," suggested Dick, after one of the protracted rests of the bear, "I wonder if it wouldn't be easier to tie his paws together, then stick these poles through and carry the ends on our shoulders?"

"We might," agreed Garry, "but this fellow is pretty hefty."

"Oh, we could carry him easily enough," interrupted Dick.

"I wasn't thinking of that," returned Garry. "My point is that his weight would cause the ropes to cut and chafe his legs, and we don't want to cause the poor beast any suffering. At any rate, we'll be home in ten minutes. Let's keep on, we have gotten

this far, and we can make the rest of the way. "Get up there, Bruin."

For some unaccountable reason, the bear decided to behave and made less trouble the remaining distance, as the boys walked along, tugging at the poles. Garry asked, "What will we name him?"

"We might call him 'Jean LeBlanc,' his nickname is 'The Bear' you know," slyly suggested Phil.

"I wouldn't disgrace a self-respecting animal with that name," declared Garry, as he started on a tirade against the halfbreed that has caused them so much trouble. Then seeing Phil and Dick both laughing at him, he stopped.

"What are you trying to do, Phil, josh me?" he demanded.

"Not trying to, he has," asserted Dick with a laugh. "But say, how about calling him Nate after our good friend Webster?"

"Suppose Nate would mind?" inquired Phil.

"Of course not, it's an honor to have someone or something named after you," returned Dick. "What say, Garry?"

"Suits me," returned their leader, "only if Nate kicks, we'll have to dig up a new name for him."

So Nate was officially christened by vote of the boys. Finally, worn-out and hungry, they reached the cabin. Bidding Phil and Dick hold their new

pet, Garry unfastened the door and was greeted with a rush by Sandy.

"Come here old top," called Garry. The dog obeyed, and Garry took his collar off. "Lucky you're a big dog and that this is an extra large collar, Sandy, it will just about fit."

The next question was what to use for a leash, until Garry thought of the coil of heavy wire used for repairing the telephone line. He secured a good sized length and doubled it, twisting one end securely about the ring in the collar used when they desired to put Sandy on a leash. Last, he secured a big spike from the cupboard, and then he hurried back, and approaching the bear from behind, quickly fastened the collar on him. Driving the spike in the wall of the cabin, he bent it back, making a loop. To this, was twisted the free end of the wire, the pole-nooses and lariat were removed, and there was the future pet of the Boy Rangers.

"There, that's done. Now in a few days he'll let us pet him—maybe," said Dick. "Now for something to eat. Guess we'll have to make out on 'canned Willie' and dumplings. Quickest thing to get and very filling."

The tinned beef and dumpling stew was soon ready, and the three hungry boys soon made short work of it. They tried the bear on dumplings, and

after sniffing at them suspiciously for a few moments, surprised the boys by eating them.

Night had fallen by this time, and although it was still early, the three tumbled into their bunks and were soon fast asleep.

Less than an hour had passed, when they were awakened by a prodigious racket outside. The chums jumped from their bunks and their first act was to reach for their rifles. Then amidst the racket, they heard a familiar voice.

"What the thunderation do you mean by jumping on me. I'll put a dent in you in another minute."

Then the three began to laugh. "Guess Nate must have fallen in with his namesake," sputtered Phil.

They threw the door open and Nate Webster entered, thoroughly riled.

"Fine welcome," he said as he saw the boys laughing. "I plumb forgot all about the possibility of you getting that tarnal critter, fact, didn't think you'd do it, and as I came around the corner, something hits me like a train, and for the next few seconds there was one heap on the ground, me and that darned bear. Go on, laugh dern ye!"

"Never mind, Nate, maybe you'll forgive us when we tell you how we got him, and that we named him after you," said Garry, controlling his laughter.

"Sho, now, you don't say so!" answered the old guide, now considerably mollified. "I've hear'n tell of cigars being named after someone, but first time I knew of a bear being named for anybody."

While Nate made coffee, spider bread and bacon for himself, the boys related the day's experiences with Bruin. At the conclusion, Nate complimented them on their prowess, and then said:

"While I was visiting the other look-out, I telephoned to Millinocket to see if there was any news. Well, there was—our friend LeBlanc has escaped from jail!"

CHAPTER V.

NATE'S GHOST STORY.

"LEBLANC escaped!" cried Garry in a disgusted tone. "If that doesn't take the cake. Here we go to work and capture a really dangerous criminal and then those dunderheads down at the jail let him slip clean through their fingers. Did you get any other news as to how he managed to get away, Nate?"

"Yep, lots of news. It wasn't the fault of the warden that he got out. He had a lot of help, and

that's the funny part of the whole business. Just where he got enough friends to help him break jail is more than I can make out. First there was the night turnkey. That isn't so strange, because he wasn't very well known. Came here with a recommendation from the Chief of Police at Thomaston, at least it is supposed that the Chief down there gave him the letter. Just now it's my private opinion that the letter was nothing more or less than a fake. At any rate, the turnkey is missing, and so is LeBlanc. Now here's the second funny part. Our old friend Anderson, who was Deputy Ranger here until the Service fired him for the good of the state, is also among the missing. Far's can be found out, he didn't intend to leave town, but was dickering with Ame Hepplethwaite for his little farm on the outskirts of the town. But he's gone, bag and baggage, without saying a word to any soul. 'Course it may be all O.K., but it looks mighty suspicious to me. I'll bet a quart of last year's potatoes that the two of them are in cahoots in some mischief or other.

"I ain't got any real reason for my suspicions except that I have noticed once or twice that Anderson was kind o' thick with that pesky breed, and a couple of weeks before you boys came up here, LeBlanc was bragging about his pull with Anderson and that he was going to get a job as Ranger, just

as if there was any chance of his doing so. However, I'm a great hand to put two and two together. Sometimes I get four for an answer, and sometimes I get twenty-two. Just now I can't add them at all till I ponder and reflect for a while. I'm going to keep my thoughts to myself till I get a few chinks filled up and a little wood sawed. I'll lay you this, though, that those two are concerned in some mischief, and that we'll hear of it afore very long."

"Do you think that LeBlanc will be back this way and give us more trouble, Nate?" inquired Phil. "Not that I care, as we will give him a warm reception the next time."

"Nope, I think you've seen the last of him," replied Nate. "Fust place he's facing a mighty serious charge of kidnapping, and second place the fact that he broke jail would make it go harder for him. He'll make tracks for the deep woods and it ain't at all unlikely that he'll head for the other side of the border. That would be the safest place for him, and I suppose that he has relatives there who would help him hide till all this business has died out. You can be sure that he'll never come back to Millinocket, because he'd be caught up quicker than a wink."

"Well, then," remarked Dick. "It looks now as though the rest of the summer would be pretty quiet

from now on. There hadn't ought to be anything to bother us."

"Don't be too sure," cautioned Nate. "There's always the danger of fire, and if one should start around this section, I'll warrant you you'll have all the excitement that you can pack into a week's time. We've been pretty lucky this summer, but out in the Northwest and in Michigan they have had two or three tearing blazes so soon. I was reading one of the government reports a while ago and it said last year that Maine had the smallest fire loss because of the efficient Ranger Service."

"Say, Nate, wouldn't you like to tell us a story?" asked Garry.

"Sho, now, I don't know any stories that are interesting enough to tell. Only man I know who can tell a story real well is Garry's father, 'Moose' Boone. He's a great hand to spin a yarn about the woods, or about anything for that matter. There's another place in Maine where you can always hear a lot of good yarns, and that's down Rockland or Calais way, where the old sailing masters and sea captains live. But if you can put up with it I'll tell you something. What will it be, hunting or war, or maybe a ghost story?"

"Do you know a real ghost story?" demanded Dick.

"Well, I cal'late I could tell you one my folks

used to tell, and they always vouched for its being true."

"Go ahead, Nate, and tell us the ghost story, at least that's my vote," said Garry. Both Phil and Dick voted the same and so the old guide commenced.

"This is supposed to have happened to my uncle and aunt who lived over in New Hampshire. My aunt and my mother were sisters, and I've heard her tell this a number of times.

"Fust off, I must tell you something about how the house was laid out. It was built like a good many of those old timers, consisting of only three rooms. Suppose a line was drawn lengthwise through the center of the house. On one side of that line was one big room. The other half of the house was divided into two rooms. One was the best room, which was scarcely ever opened except for a funeral or a wedding, or when the Ladies' Aid met at the house. The other was a big bedroom. Separating these two rooms was a narrow hallway, and from this opened the front door, or as they called it in those days, the fore door.

"The big room was kitchen and dining room and setting room all in one. Set in the back was the great fireplace with a crane swinging out from it. Then at each end of this room was a door opening out into the yard. One door opened on a pathway

that led to the barn, while the other door opened on the path to the well. My uncle and aunt were named Eastman, and this story that I'm going to tell you took place during the Civil War.

"Well, anyway, one night Aunt Heppy and Uncle Reuben were setting in the big room, just getting ready to go to bed, when Uncle Reuben remembered he'd got a weekly paper at the post-office that afternoon, and so he said he'd read the war news out loud for a spell before they went to bed.

"They were both mighty interested, because when the company from their town marched away to join the state regiments, their three only sons were wearing a uniform. Then, right in the midst of a sentence, the old brass knocker on the front door gave one mighty clap. Coming right in the middle of Uncle's reading about the war, it gave them a kind of shock for a minute. Then Aunt Heppy cal'ulating it might be some neighbor in want of help, got up to answer the knock, but when she got to the front door, there wasn't a sign of a soul around the house. There was a bright moon, and she could look down to the road but never a sign of a person could she see.

"She came back and told Reuben, and he got up and went to the door, and even walked down to the road, where he could see for some distance either

way, but his eyes weren't any better than Aunt Hep-py's when it came to discovering anyone.

"However, there wasn't anything they could do and Uncle came back and read the rest of the news and then wound up the clock, remarking that they'd better be getting along to bed. Just as he gave the key the last turn, there came two clear, sharp knocks on one of the side doors in the kitchen, on the door that opened on the well path.

"Uncle Reuben ran to the door and threw it open, but—there wasn't a soul in sight. This time the old man didn't waste any time, but running to the fireplace got down the shotgun that hung over it, and then he chased out of the house and walked all around it, looking behind trees, and even going down to the barn. He thought it might be some tramp trying to give them a scare. But his tour showed nothing. There wasn't a soul in sight. There were a couple of rough characters in town, young fellows who might have thought it a practical joke, but there was no place that they could have gotten to, to hide, in the few seconds it had taken Uncle Reuben to run to the door and then go around the house. The only place was in the big tree in front of the house, so Uncle stood under it and called, 'In two minutes I'm going to shoot both barrels of this gun into the tree, so if there's anyone up there, he'd better be heading down mighty quick.'

He waited the two minutes and hearing no answer nor the sound of anyone climbing down, he let both barrels bang into the branches of the tree. If there had been anyone hiding there, he would have been tolerably sick just about that time.

"But neither shot brought any result, and he could feel the hair rising on the back of his neck, just like it seems to on anyone when they're scared of something and don't know what it is. Well, Uncle Reuben came back and shut the door and then he and Aunt Heppy sat down in front of the fireplace and just waited. Neither of them said anything, but both seemed to feel that something was going to happen.

"There was a dead silence. Nothing could be heard but the ticking of the old grandfather clock that stood in the corner and the occasional snap of a pine log as it burned in the fireplace, or the creak of the loose board as Aunt Heppy rocked over it. Finally she got up and moved a chair so the creaking would stop.

"They waited almost an hour, getting calmer in the meantime, and finally Uncle rose and stretched himself and was just opening his mouth to say they might as well go to bed, when the knock on the third and last door came.

"This time there were three sharp, clear knocks.

"All the time they had been sitting there, Uncle

had held his shotgun, which he had reloaded, between his knees, and when the third knock had finished, he ran and threw the door open, and dashed madly around the house. But there wasn't a soul in sight. It couldn't have been a human that made the knock on the door, because they could not have gotten away in the seconds that it took for Uncle Reuben to get outdoors and make the circuit of the house.

"By this time, both my uncle and aunt were really scared. Uncle Reuben wasn't afraid of anything living, and for that matter, neither was Hunt Hep-
py. But this uncanny knocking had unnerved them completely. Finally Uncle Reuben marked the date in the almanac, and they went to bed. For some reason that neither of them could explain, they felt sure that there would be no more knocking that night.

"A very soft rain had fallen late that afternoon, and just before my Uncle went to bed he told his wife that in the morning he would be up at dawn and go out and look to see if there were any tracks around the house except those that he had made himself. So off to bed they went, and in the morning, true to his word, Uncle went out and looked over every inch of the ground, but there was never a sign of a footprint except his own that he had

made while he was wandering around the night before looking for the mysterious knocker."

Old Nate stopped and refilled his pipe. Then he held silence for a few moments. As he gave no sign of going on, Garry asked:

"Well, was it a real ghost after all, or did your Uncle find out later that it was just some intruder or mischievous boy?"

Nate looked at the boys, and then went on in a quiet voice.

"I just stopped while I was thinking about the story myself as I have often done since I first heard it. At any rate, nothing was heard for several days, and Uncle and Aunt had almost stopped talking about it, until about two weeks later. You must remember that mails were slower in those days. My Uncle went to the postoffice, and came back with a letter with the mark of the government at Washington on it. He had opened it, and his face was haggard. When he got home, he quietly told my Aunt that their three sons had been killed in battle, all on the same night. They looked at the date in the communication from the War Department, and then both remembered something. They went to the almanac where Uncle had marked the date of the mysterious knockings on the three doors, and found that it was the identical night!"

Nate stopped speaking and as he did, there came

a crashing sound outside the house. The boys could almost feel their hair rising and even Nate, ordinarily calm and unruffled, was startled for the moment.

The boys grabbed their rifles, and led by Nate ran and threw open the cabin door.

CHAPTER VI.

ON PATROL.

JUST what the boys expected to find outside the cabin they were not prepared to think, much less say. Following right on the heels of the weird story of the mysterious rappings, they were all more than startled.

As they turned the corner of the cabin, they saw, in the light of the moon, a sight that made them shout with laughter. The captured bear had, in roaming about as much as the length of wire would allow him, become entangled with a stack of firewood that the boys had chopped for the fireplace.

Bruin was sitting on the ground contemplating the ruin that he had made, with an almost woe-begone expression on his face.

"Gosh, I'd forgotten all about that dratted b'ar,"

laughed Nate. "I was almost ready to believe that we were being attacked by LeBlanc and all his friends. Seems to me I'd just as soon have a baby elephant around my shack as a half-grown bear cub. They both do about an equal amount of damage."

"What are we going to do with this chap now that we have him, Nate?" inquired Phil as he set about re-stacking the firewood.

"Couldn't tell," replied Nate promptly. "Think if I had him I'd untie him and chase him about a mile and send him home apacking."

"No, I don't mean that," responded Phil with a laugh. "I mean where shall we keep him. We cannot take him into the cabin, and if it rains, it won't be any too comfortable out here in the open, and there isn't any cave here that we could let him use for a den."

"Wall, I should calculate that the best thing to do would be to build a little leanto here against the wall on the back of the cabin. You can cut enough saplings in half an hour to fix him up all right, and he'll be pleased as Punch with his new home. He's just about at an age where he will have brains enough to be tamed and prob'ly you can make a pretty good pet out of him."

"Do you think he'll ever get tame enough so that

we can turn him loose and yet he'll come back to the cabin?" inquired Garry.

"Sure, as soon as you feed him a few times and make a lot of him, he will be glad to come back where there's always food waiting for him. Well, this is enough for tonight. Let's turn in, because I'm off for town early in the morning. If you boys want me to take in any mail you better get your letters ready now because I'm going to start out just as soon as day breaks."

Nate accordingly climbed into one of the bunks, and the three boys wrote hasty notes to their folks at home.

The chums were routed out of bed while it was yet dark by the smell of the coffee and bacon the old guide was preparing.

"Whew!" grumbled Dick. "I bet I could have slept three hours more this morning. What's the weather going to be, Nate?"

"Fair and fine, there are cobwebs on the branches," replied Nate. "Guess you fellows had better make a patrol today and get back into harness. I've got a hunch that we're going to have a bad fire one of these days soon. We have been altogether too lucky. Hope my hunch is wrong, though. When are you boys going to get that wireless in working order? I'm kinder curious to see if it will work. I'm not set against new fangled

notions in any way, but just the same I'd advise you to keep an eye on your regular telephone lines, especially after a high wind."

The four finished their breakfasts and then Nate bade the boys goodbye and set off with a long swinging step towards Millinocket.

"Well, where will we make the first patrol, over the river side or to the west?" asked Garry. "Also, will we draw for the 'tin can'?"

"I would suggest that you take the first lookout duty," remarked Phil, "because then you can start assembling and mounting the receiving station of our wireless. The sooner we can get it installed and in working order, the better I will be pleased, for I am anxious to hear how it sounds to talk through the air without any wires, just having your voice travel along through space. Of course, if you would rather draw for duty, it's all right, only it will delay getting the apparatus up."

"I think that's a prime suggestion," said Garry, "and if that meets with approval all around, we'll make it so. One thing, though, it will mean two or three days' continuous duty, and so you two will have to do steady patrol. What say?"

Both Dick and Phil agreed that it would be no hardship to do extra patrol, since it would mean the speedy installation of the prized wireless outfit.

"Now, Garry," said Dick, "which way would you advise for the first patrol?"

"I think the river patrol would be the best, because Nate has only just returned from the western side, and everything was all right there. Tomorrow you can go in that direction.

Phil would have preferred to go on the westerly trip because the squirrels seemed to be more plentiful in that direction and he was hungry for a good squirrel pie or stew. When he explained this, both the other boys laughed, and Garry consoled him with the thought that he could have a good beefstew that night which would tide him over for one day.

Before starting out on the patrol, Dick and Phil helped Garry carry the boxed apparatus up to the lookout station on the hilltop. Here they left their leader and Sandy. Garry immediately began to unpack the precious instruments, and waved the boys a cheery goodbye, not dreaming that one of the couple would be near death before night fell.

The patrolmen moved towards the river at a brisk pace, both keeping a sharp eye out for a small game and for any suspicious tracks. They did not think for an instant that LeBlanc would dare to come back to that section of the woods, but it would be safest to watch out for signs that he was in the vicinity, for they knew he would attempt to wreak a swift

vengeance on them for capturing him when he tried to steal the little Graham girl.

They reached the river bank, and unshipping the canoe from where it was hidden in a clump of brush, paddled swiftly upstream. It was a glorious morning, and the sunshine sparkled on the river. The recent heavy rains had swollen the river to some extent, and since more water than usual was running over the rapids, they decided to attempt a trip upstream through them.

It was a hard task, and they bent to their paddles in grim earnest. When they were almost through, they met with an accident that for a moment made things seem precarious. Dick, who was paddling bow, had the misfortune to break his paddle. Calling to Phil to hold the frail craft steady, he quickly reached for the spare paddle that they always carried. He was not a moment too soon, for Phil was having all he could do to hold the canoe steady against the rush of the current. However, the quick work on the part of Dick in getting the spare paddle prevented them from being tipped into the swift current as it went coursing over the small but treacherous rapids.

Arriving at the northern boundary, they hid the canoe in its accustomed berth, and struck inland. When they reached the 'phone line, they made a test call which Garry answered immediately. They

asked Garry how he was coming with the assembling of the new 'phone and found that he was making more than satisfactory progress.

"Let's take in about another mile and then eat lunch, after which we will have time to make the edge of the section and return in plenty of time to get home before dark falls," said Dick.

Just as he spoke, Phil threw his rifle to his shoulder and winged a chattering squirrel sitting on a tree branch some yards away.

"There, that's your lunch, Phil," remarked Dick. "Now I see I must get one also, or else eat a cold lunch and watch you enviously while you're eating squirrel roasted over a nice hot bed of coals."

However, before they had walked another half a mile, Dick luckily brought down a squirrel for himself.

Arriving at a clearing, they glanced up at the sky and found the sun to be almost overhead, indicating that it was nearly noontime. The boys cleared away the pine needles from a small space, and soon had a brisk fire going. After putting the coffee on to boil, they skinned their squirrels, and spitting them on a sharp stick, held them over the glowing coals. In less than no time they had a feast fit for a king. There is probably nothing more toothsome than a plump squirrel roasted in this fashion, unless perhaps it is a freshly caught trout

wrapped in a few green leaves and buried in the hot coals of a glowing campfire.

Lunch was soon over, and the boys, as became good Rangers, carefully stamped out the coals of the fire. At least one-half of the forest fires are caused by careless campers who neglect to extinguish their campfires after a picnic in the woods.

As they started out again, they heard a rustle in some brush, and thinking it might be a small animal, Dick crashed into the brush, and bent down to see what it was.

Just too late he heard the warning of a whirring rattle. There was a flash through the air, and Dick felt something like a live coal strike his arm.

He gave a cry of mingled pain and alarm, that brought Phil rushing to him.

"Be careful, Phil," Dick cried, "I've been bitten by a rattlesnake!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEE TREE.

PHIL sprang to the spot where the rattler was making away, and throwing his rifle to his shoulder, took a seemingly hasty aim and fired a bullet unerringly into the reptile's head. Then, reversing

his rifle, he clubbed it a few times with the butt, although his sure shot had put an end to the snake's life.

Then he devoted his attention to Dick, who although no coward, was undeniably scared at receiving what is nearly always a fatal bite.

Snapping out his knife he ripped up the shirt sleeve, and on Dick's arm saw two small discolored holes, and an arm that rapidly beginning to swell. His first act was to whip out his handkerchief. This he tied around Dick's arm just above the elbow. With his hatchet he slivered a small branch from a tree. Sticking this in between Dick's arm and the handkerchief he began to twist until soon the handkerchief was almost cutting into the arm. Snatching his bandanna handkerchief from around his neck, he securely tied the stick into position so that it could not slip.

Phil had correctly made what is commonly known to doctors as a tourniquet. The making of a tourniquet is one of the first things that should be learned by anyone who intends to go into the woods. Its first use is generally in case of a severe cut or gash, and should be tied near the gash, but between it and the heart. This prevents almost entirely the circulation of the blood, and prevents the bleeding to death of the patient before help can be summoned, or the proper attention paid to the injury.

In Dick's case, the stopping of the circulation prevented to a great extent, the poisonous venom of the rattler from going all through the body by way of the veins and arteries.

"Grit your teeth now, Dick, I am going to perform a little surgical operation on you," he told the suffering boy.

"Go ahead, I can stand it alright," muttered Dick. His arm was beginning to pain severely by this time.

Phil plunged the blade of his knife into the ground several times, cleaning it thoroughly, for it had been used for numberless purposes. Then, lighting a match, he held the tip of the blade in the flame. He talked hurriedly as he worked, saying, "this is about the best I can do in the way of sterilizing this blade, but fire is about as good an antiseptic as is known."

Dick gritted his teeth as Phil cut a narrow gash over each of the two tiny spots where the fangs of the rattler had pierced the skin. Then he proceeded to suck from the wound the poison venom. This may seem like a heroic deed to our readers. It was, but it is perhaps the only way to save the life of one bitten by a poisonous snake.

Phil then said to his chum, "now can you bear it if I burn this a little? It will hurt, but it is the

only way I can cauterize this wound, and I know neither of us want to take any chances."

"Go ahead, old timer," grittily answered Dick. "If it hadn't been for your quick work, I might be dying now."

Taking a cartridge, Phil worked the steel projectile from the shell with his teeth. On the two gashes, he poured a minute quantity of the powder, then touched a match to it. The searing pain brought a groan from Dick's lips.

"There, I'm sorry, but it had to be done," said Phil as he wrapped a bit of bandaging about Dick's arm. "Now, we'll let you rest a minute and then hike for home. Better let that tourniquet stay on for a few minutes now, but I think the danger is all over."

Phil's words were true. The danger was past, but had it not been for his prompt work and knowledge of what to do in case of a bite from a venomous insect or reptile, Dick's life would have been snuffed out like a candle in a gust of wind.

Dick rested for awhile, and then pronounced himself ready to take up the home-ward hike. There was a noticeable swelling of his arm, but otherwise he felt pretty well, considering what he had gone through during the previous few minutes.

The two chums journeyed slowly to the river bank. As they passed the 'phone line, they paused

for a moment and discussed the advisability of 'phoning to Garry, but decided not to alarm him. It was well along in the afternoon when they reached the spot where the canoe was cached.

Dick's arm made paddling impossible, so he lay in the bottom of the canoe while Phil with swift strokes of his paddle, sent the frail craft speeding through the glistening waters. The downstream current aided him, and soon they were at the head of the rapids. By this time they had shot the rapids so often that Phil had no hesitancy in going through the miniature whirlpools, even though there was no one in the bow of the canoe to help keep the craft steady.

"Hang on, Dick," he shouted. "Here we go through the rapids like a hot knife through butter." The trip through the foaming current was of short duration, and there remained only a short stretch of water before they came to the spot on the river bank that marked where their trail to the cabin started. The canoe was cached and the pair started inland towards the shack.

"I hope Garry has a good hot supper waiting," said Dick, "I am tired and hungry."

They reached the cabin just after night had fallen, and soon were inside eagerly awaiting the meal that Garry was putting the finishing touches to. As the boys ate, Phil told Garry of the almost fatal

adventure of the day. When he had finished, Garry remarked:

"It was a mighty foolish thing to do, not looking for another. It is almost proverbial that the mate of a dead snake will always come and wait for some time near the dead one. I suppose they have some sort of a snake idea of revenge, and believe me, we should all be careful of that spot there.

Garry looked at Dick's arm, which was beginning to resume its normal size as the swelling abated. He pronounced it all O. K., and congratulated Phil on his surgery.

"How did you happen to think of using gunpowder to make the cautery?" he asked Phil.

"Why, I remember hearing Tad Kennedy, who was on the Mexican border with the army, tell of a buddy of his doing that when he was bitten by a tarantula on the desert once. This chap was alone, and had to work quick, and did it that way," replied Phil.

"Well, we'll hope that there will be no more snake bites, but I am going to 'phone Nate to bring or send us some sticks of silver nitrate which is generally used for cauterizing a wound. It will be a good thing to have around the place anyway, for it is an antiseptic, although a powerful one, as well as a cauterizing agent."

Garry, upon being questioned, said that the re-

ceiving station of the wireless was practically installed, but a little more work needing to be done. He had not yet unpacked the carrying apparatus, but this could wait.

It was decided before the boys went to bed that Dick should take the lookout next day in order to rest up after his strenuous experience of the day. This would, of course, delay the completion of the work on the wireless, but that was a matter that could not be helped.

Dick protested that he was perfectly able to resume the patrol on the following day, but Garry immediately vetoed this, and as he had been chosen leader at the beginning of the summer, the matter was so settled. Dick soon bundled himself into his bunk, and was hardly rolled in his blankets before he dropped off to sleep.

"I move we patrol to the west tomorrow," remarked Garry, "I'd like to meet the Ranger on the adjoining section and say 'howdy' to him. Besides, we can knock down a few squirrels and perhaps a rabbit or two. They seem to be thicker in that section of the woods than towards the river bank. I imagine that is because there is quite a bit of hardwood over in that district and consequently, quite a few nut trees of various kinds. We can test that 'phone line too. I have been wondering also, if we couldn't string a wire to the edge of our section

and then get the other Ranger to string a wire from the lookout house on his land, we could do the job while on patrol, and we could communicate with him, and also it would be sociable, too. Some rainy day when we have time, I wonder if we couldn't run a wire from the 'tin can' down to the house, also. It would be useful in case we have to stand a night watch sometime. So far, we have not had to do it, fortunately."

"How's the bear?" asked Phil.

"Getting a little tamer," responded Garry. "Surprising as it may seem, he takes quite a bit to Sandy, and I think in a few days he will be quite friendly. Then we won't have to keep him tied up. Of course, when we let him loose there is the chance that he will not return, but if we get him perfectly friendly, I think he will come back after a jaunt by his lonesome in the woods. Now let's hike to bed. I think I could sleep on a harrow tonight, I'm so tired."

"Same here," said Phil, as he banked the fire by laying a few fresh sticks over the blazing embers, and then covered the whole thing with ashes. Banking a fire is an old kink that saves rekindling in the morning. When day breaks the ashes are raked away and there are still quite a few live embers. Brush and chips can then be thrown on, and in no time a rousing fire is again going. This does not

start your fire more quickly, but it means that you have a bed of coals sooner for your cooking.

The boys tumbled out early in the morning. The swelling had practically disappeared from Dick's arm, and his sleep had made him almost himself again.

Breakfast was hastily eaten, and then Garry and Phil started across the section for the western boundary, while Dick, accompanied by the faithful Sandy climbed the hill to spend the day in the "tin can," as they called the corrugated iron-sheathed lookout cabin.

The two young patrolmen walked rapidly, intending to cover as much distance as possible during the cool of the morning. Before the sun was well up, they reached the 'phone line, and hitching up the carrying 'phone, gave Dick a ring to inquire how he was feeling. Dick said everything was O.K., and that he had unpacked the rest of the wireless outfit against Garry's wishes, finishing the work the next day.

A little before noon they reached the boundary line and travelled north a mile or so till they came to a clump of hardwood forest. Here they each knocked down a squirrel. From the appearance of the surrounding land, squatters had evidently lived there at one time, for there were the ruins of two shacks, and a clearing with a small undergrowth

of brush. All over the clearing were clumps of goldenrod.

Scraping a spot near a spring, Garry got out the coffee pot and skillet and prepared to make coffee and spiderbread. While he was mixing the dough, Phil cut some brush and a few small sticks and soon had a bed of coals. The squirrels were skinned, stuck on a pointed stick and roasted over the glowing coals.

After the lunch, Garry, while prowling about the back of the ruins of the shacks, found several bushes of wild raspberries. He shouted to Phil, and they proceeded to enjoy dessert, eating the succulent berries as fast as they picked them.

When they had eaten their fill, they decided to pick a quantity to take home with them. The question of what to carry the berries back to the cabin in was soon solved when Phil spied a pair of birch trees a short distance away. In a few moments they had stripped a band of birch bark, and this, rolled into a cone, made an ideal basket holding about four quarts. This was soon filled, and, with a covering of moist leaves, was tucked away till they would return there later in the afternoon.

Just as they were preparing to start towards the lookout cabin of the adjoining range, Garry halted and stood watching intently.

"What do you see, Garry?" inquired Phil.

"I may be all wrong," replied Garry, "but I think I see bees."

"Nothing startling about that," answered his chum, laughing. "I almost got stung on two different occasions. But what's a bee, more or less?"

"Lots of things occur to me, Phil, old topper. First place, there is goldenrod. Second, I see bees, third, you were almost stung because you were in what is known as the line of flight. You know bees travel from the flowers where they get their pollen to the place they make the honey in an invaring straight line. They are quicker to attack when you get in the line of flight. And in the last place, there is probably a bee tree not very far distant from where we are now. Now consider, bees, beetree, honey. Does that cause anything like an idea to wiggle around in your head?"

"Boy! I'll say so. Honey means better tasting flapjacks in the morning. Now the question is how are we going to find that bee tree?"

"That's simple," answered Garry. "We'll simply follow along the line of flight I just told you about, and eventually that will lead us to the tree."

"How are we going to get the honey without being stung to death?" inquired Phil.

"Simple again. We'll just smoke them out. However, that means that we must be here after dark. Now it will take some little time to find that

tree, for of course one can't go fast enough to follow one lone bee, but must wait and follow successive bees that are continually coming and going. So I suggest that you shake a foot and hike back to the 'phone line, and tell Dick that we won't be home until late, possibly not until morning. In the meantime I can be following the bees, and I'll leave the usual trail, either a blaze on a tree, or the usual scout sign, a small rock placed on a larger one, with a twig to show a turn in the trail, placed either to the right or left of the rock, as the case may be, and I think it likely that you will catch up with me quickly, perhaps even before I come to the tree.'

Phil set out immediately, leaving his knapsack cached behind him, so as to make better speed, and carrying only his rifle with him. Left to himself, Garry proceeded to strip from the birch trees several large pieces of bark. These strips were to make containers for the honeycomb such as they used for the berries.

This done, he took up the trail of the bees who were continually winging their way back and forth from the patch of goldenrod to the trees where they made the honey.

His progress was necessarily slow, for he would soon lose sight of the bee, and sometimes would have to wait several minutes till another came along. He was lucky to be able to follow the course of one

bee more than fifty or sixty yards, even by running. Then he was obliged to stop frequently to gash a mark in a tree to let Phil know which way he was going. This was what is known as blazing a trail.

He had covered only three-quarters of a mile when Phil caught up with him.

"How's Dick," inquired Garry.

"Fit as a fiddle, and says we're not to come back without that honey if we have to stay away for a week," answered Phil all in one breath.

They proceeded a few hundred feet further, when Garry called a halt. He pointed to an old tree, or rather about six feet of trunk, old and blasted, with a crevice through which bees were continually entering and leaving.

"There you are," he shouted. "There's your bee tree, Phil. Now all we need is nightfall, then fine fresh honey for flapjacks!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT IN THE FOREST.

"WHY can't we smoke them out right now, and just cache the honey. That will save us coming back here at night," inquired Phil.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know very much about smoking out a bee tree, and by doing

it at night we can avoid getting badly stung, as the bees are practically dazed after nightfall," answered Garry.

"What's on the docket now," asked Phil.

"Let's head towards the lookout cabin in this section and find out from him if the Ranger is patrolling in this section or not. We can take up with him the matter of the 'phone line from his lookout to ours. It is probable that we will have to furnish him with enough wire to string up, but then we have a large quantity of it over at our shack. I think that when the lines were strung up on our section it was originally planned to have one extra means of communication somewhere, and then whoever was doing the work gave up the idea for some reason. That accounts for the amount that is on hand. Well, let's get going. I imagine that the lookout is on that high hill that we can see about five miles off in that direction," and Garry pointed to the northwest as he spoke.

The chums trudged along through the woods, chattering as they went, and now and then stopping to pick off a squirrel who ventured too close within range of their guns.

"We will have one fine squirrel pie tomorrow night, and that with a raspberry shortcake and honey and spider bread we'll have a feast that you couldn't get in the finest hotel in the country," said

Phil, his mouth fairly watering as he thought of the dinner that they would enjoy the next night.

"Don't talk about it," begged Garry. "You'll get me so that I won't be able to wait until we get home. We had better bag a few more squirrels and then we can invite ourselves to eat with the chaps on this section."

They treked steadily for almost an hour, then Phil stopped in his tracks and remarked. "Garry, we are a couple of numbskulls for hiking along here without the least idea where we are going. That lookout may be on that hill we saw from the clearing and then again it may not. I'm going to climb a tree and have a look."

"Good idea, take that big fellow there, you ought to be able to see for miles from that one," pointing as he spoke to a giant spruce, a veritable king of trees. It was tall and there were no boughs branching out from it for at least twenty feet from the ground. Garry made his remark only to josh Phil a little. It was much too big for either boy to be able to clasp his hands if he encircled the trunk with his arms, but it offered no dismay to Phil, who promptly set about making the ascent. He unstrapped his knapsack, and rummaged through it until he found a short coil of wire such as they always carried on their patrols in the event that a break would be found on one of the 'phone lines.

Standing fairly close to the tree he threw the wire around and took the measure of the circumference of the tree and his own body, allowing about a foot of space between himself and the trunk. Then with this measure he made a double thickness of wire, splicing the ends carefully with the pliers that formed a part of each Ranger's outfit, so that the tree trunk was inside the wire circle.

"I ought to have climbing irons to make this easier, but guess I can manage it as it is," he told Garry. Wise as Garry was in the woods lore, the stunt that Phil was about to perform was a new one to him.

Stooping under, he was inside the wire himself. Grasping the wire he gave it a flip so that it slanted up from the ground on the far side of the tree. Then leaning back against the wire he braced his feet against the trunk. Then by lifting one foot after the other, and giving the wire a dexterous flip at each step, he soon was moving steadily up the trunk. By leaning against the wire he kept from slipping down, and the wire cut into the bark of the tree and so kept in position where he put it each time. This may sound like an easy thing to do, but it takes some practice to achieve perfection. The only way to do it is to start with a small tree and only climb a few feet until one gets the knack of climbing in this fashion. Once learned, the thickest tree will

hold no terrors for the climber. The secret is in flipping the wire up so quickly when the body is thrown slightly in toward the tree, that it catches on the instant. Then the climber leans back against the wire in a flash and the wire holds tightly to the trunk. Phil made the twenty feet in a short time, and then let it fall to the ground after he had grasped the first bough. In a short time then he was at the top of the tree. Looking out toward the hill top he could see the sun flashing on a bright object, that was evidently the corrugated iron roof of the lookout, or as the boys called it, the "tin can." Having gotten the course with his compass he speedily made the descent. When he reached the last bough, getting to the ground was a simple matter. All that was necessary to do was to climb out along the bough until he was almost at the end. Then the weight of his body was sufficient to drag down the bough toward the ground, and when within six feet of the mark he let go, dropping easily to the ground beneath while the bough flew back to its normal position.

"Phil, I'll take my hat off to you. That was some slick stunt. Where in the world did you learn to do it, and why did you keep it a secret?" asked Garry admiringly.

"I learned it from a telephone lineman, who said it was the only way to get up a tree that was too

big to grasp comfortably with your arms and knees and shinney up. I only found out about it this spring, and kept it a secret simply so I could show off a little bit some day when we were in the woods. That was before any of us knew we were going to spend the summer in the real woods. It's simple, and you must try it when we have a little more time. Dick could do it too, even if he is a little fat," answered Phil.

"Did you sight the cabin, or the lookout, rather?"

"Yes," said Phil. "It is about three miles due west from where we are now, so you were right in your guess. We had better make tracks so we can eat something there and then start back for the bee tree before it gets too dark to find a trail," for they had been blazing the trail as they went.

They had covered a little more than a mile and were approaching what seemed to be a clearing, when they heard a shouting and the sound of blows, and cries of "Hit him harder. Knock him down. Couple more of you pile on top of him. Slam him so he'll know he's been in a fight. Knock him down!"

Garry and Phil stopped in their tracks as though rooted to the spot.

"That sounds as though someone was getting killed over there in that clearing. Let's take it on the run and see if we can help some chap that seems

to have a crew on him. Is your gun loaded?" asked Garry.

"Loaded is right. Let's go!" responded Phil, and without another word they started at a swift pace for the scene of the fight. Just as they approached the clearing, they could see what appeared to be several lumberjacks engaged in thoroughly beating a big fellow who was struggling valiantly against great odds, and slowly being borne to the ground. Without looking any further or waiting to bandy words, Phil and Garry threw their rifles to their shoulders and cried out: "Put up your hands and lay off beating that man!"

"Isn't one of you the size to do it alone?" added Garry.

To the great amazement of both boys, the men took one startled look at them and then burst into shouts of laughter. Garry and Phil looked bewildered, but nevertheless kept their guns in a handy position to use. While they stood thus, a man from the other edge of the clearing, clad in woolen shirt, breeches and puttees, and carrying a short megaphone, came hastily towards them, a scowl on his face.

"Look here you two, haven't you got any sense? You've gone and ruined about two hundred feet of the best fight film I've ever directed, and spoiled a half an hour's work."

As the light broke on the boys, they looked sheepishly at each other and then too, burst into laughter. Unwittingly they had come upon a motion picture company at work, instead of a band of ruffians robbing or murdering some unfortunate woodsman.

The director of the company finally seeing that every one was laughing over the matter, chased the frown from his face and joined in the fun. Then for the first time, noticing the semi-uniform that the chums wore, asked:

"Are you boys camping in this vicinity?"

"No, sir," answered Garry. "We are members of the State Ranger Service on duty protecting the woods from forest fires. Haven't you met the Ranger in this section yet?"

"Why, no, we have only been here two days, and haven't seen a soul. Do you mean that all these forests have men patrolling them? And how could two of you stop a fire here once it got started?" asked the director, shooting his questions at them one after the other.

"Why, yes," answered Garry. "There are men in all parts of the Maine woods who act as lookout men on the hilltops and who patrol the woods on set routes, keeping an eye out for danger, and the Rangers are not forced to fight the fires, although of course they stop it if such a thing is possible and give aid to the fire fighters. The usual thing

when a patrolman discovers a fire or one is spotted by the lookout is to telephone to the Deputy Ranger of the district and he has crews of men who will respond on call and fight the fires."

"Well, that is certainly some system. I don't believe I ever heard of it before except in a vague sort of a way. And that reminds me, I am at work on a scenario now that deals with the woods, and I wonder if you couldn't give me a little help in explaining one or two things, and also tell me about the locality hereabouts so that I can find locations. By location I mean natural outdoor settings," concluded the director.

Both the boys were highly gratified that their advice should be asked by the movie man, and Phil replied:

"We will be glad to give you any help we can, but didn't you bring a guide with you to help you out on just such things as that? How did you find your way here?"

"Oh, we had a guide all right, who brought us here, but he isn't with us any longer. By the way, excuse me, my name is Andrews, and let me also introduce you to some of the people of the company. One after another he introduced the little band of actors and actresses to the young Rangers, and all appeared very much interested in the two boys and their work. Especially was this true of the leading

lady, whose name, according to the director was Eulalie Carter. She was a tall, dark-haired girl, very handsome and jolly, and she immediately plied the boys with a hundred and one questions about their life in the woods. These questions the boys answered to the best of their ability, although since she was a city girl who had never before been in the Big Woods, some of her questions were most amusing and some would have taxed the ability of a Solomon to answer.

Finally the director interrupted to ask some questions, and strangely his first one was:

"I don't suppose you boys could tell me where to find some bears, or even one bear. Our scenario calls for a scene with a bear breaking into a tent to steal food, but I am afraid it will have to hold over until we can get back to New York and get a bear, a tame one, from one of the motion picture company zoos."

The boys laughed and said to ask them something hard. Then they told of the bear they had caught and told the director that they thought he might make shift with the animal although it was not thoroughly tame.

"Don't worry about that. I have worked with animals before and this one will be an easy job, particularly if he is as you say, partly tame. And

now, where near here can we find water, I mean a lake or a river?"

When the boys told him that there was a river on the other side of their section the director was more than pleased. He asked and received permission for his company to take pictures on the property. Suddenly Garry asked:

"How did your guide happen to leave you?"

"Why," said the director with a laugh in which he was joined by several of the others, "he had something the matter with his fingers and we were obliged to discharge him."

"Something the matter with his fingers?" repeated Phil in a puzzled tone.

"Yes, Miss Carter's diamond bracelet and the leading man's gold watch stuck to his fingers yesterday, and someone happened to see him, so last night we sent him packing off, bag and baggage," replied the director.

"Too bad you got in with the wrong kind of a man, most of the guides in the state are honest, fine men. What was the man's name and what did he look like?" asked Garry.

"Why he was a tall man, with a heavy black mustache and heavy eyebrows," answered Andrews, "and his name was Anderson."

"Anderson!" echoed both the boys. "Why that

name and description fit the discharged Deputy Ranger."

"And so he is in this part of the country after all," said Garry. "That means that we must keep a double watch from now on until we know for sure that he is gone. Phil, I have a hunch that trouble is in the wind, and that we are right on the heels of another adventure!"

CHAPTER IX.

A VOICE IN THE NIGHT.

DIRECTOR ANDREWS was much surprised at what Garry said, and immediately quizzed the young Rangers as to what they meant. In a few words the boys told the company of their adventures with LeBlanc and the fact that Anderson was supposed to be very friendly with the halfbreed, hence was to be watched if one might judge by the company he kept.

"Well," remarked Andrews, "I suppose we ought to have a guide, but after that experience we thought we had better shift for ourselves as much as possible. Could you suggest anything?"

The question was addressed to Garry who answered: "Since you say you are going to leave this vicinity and come over on our section for some pictures, we could give you all the assistance you need, and in the meantime we can telephone from our lookout and get Silas Peabody, a guide whom we know is dependable and honest and whom we can recommend highly."

Andrews thought that this would be the best course to pursue, and then said that after they had retaken the fight scene which the Rangers had unwittingly spoiled on him, they would be ready to leave and move to the next section. The light had been fading as they were talking, and so the director called off work for the remainder of the day and remarked it was nearly time for supper.

Miss Carter had been looking at the packs the boys wore, and seeing a squirrel tail protruding from Phil's knapsack, asked what it was. Phil promptly showed her the little animal and remarked that they were going to have them for supper the next night, but on learning that three or four of the small company had never eaten squirrel, they decided to cook them then and there and give the actors and actresses a treat.

The necessary provisions were soon forthcoming from the stores of the movie people and Phil soon had a dough made and the pie, in a covered alumi-

num dish, was stuck in the glowing embers and soon cooking merrily.

While the supper was cooking the boys examined with interest the camera used in the taking of motion pictures. The cameraman explained to them the working of the camera and showed them how the film was run through for taking of the thousands of tiny pictures that go to make up a reel.

Garry and Phil were especially interested in the telescopic attachment. This, the cameraman explained, was a comparatively recent invention, used, for the first time during the war on the Italian-Austrian battle front, by means of which the news weeklies were able to get real battle pictures at a great distance away from the actual fighting.

Supper was soon ready, and the squirrel pie was voted the best part of the entire meal.

"I wish we had a little of that honey now, Phil," remarked Garry as he took up a piece of spider bread and covered it with strawberry jam. "It would beat bottled store jam all hollow."

"What are you talking about honey up here in the wilderness for," demanded Miss Carter. "How are you going to get it with the nearest store sixty miles away?"

Garry then told her of the finding of the bee tree, and further said they were going back that night to get it. She was immediately interested, and ex-

pressed a desire to see the smoking out process. One of the other members of the company and the director were also desirous of seeing it, so the boys arranged that they should start out immediately.

"You don't mean to say that you are going wandering through the woods looking for that tree in the dark do you?" asked Miss Carter in astonishment. "How in the world will you ever find it?"

The making of a blazed trail by cutting a small gash in the bark of the trees along the line was explained to her, and then she wanted to know how they could see in the dark to find the blaze marks.

"That's easy," laughed Garry. "We'll start now and show you how easy it is."

He and Phil went over to a small pine tree, and breaking off several small branches so that part of the knot came with the branch, provided themselves thus with torches made by nature herself. The resinous sap of the pines was as good as any kerosene ever made. Garry held one of these torches in the fire until it was burning brightly and then set out.

Following Garry's lead they made quick time back to the clearing where the bee tree stood. Both Andrews, the director, and Miss Carter marveled at the unerring accuracy with which the boys could spot the blaze marks in the tree. The trip could almost have been made by use of a compass, as the

course lay almost due southeast from where the movie people were encamped.

At last the clearing was reached, and then Garry got out the birch bark strips he had procured earlier in the day, and rolled them into large cones. Along the free edge he punched a few holes, and then by running a twig, or rather weaving it in and out of the holes, soon made a small number of serviceable carriers.

"Now for the smoking process," he called to the others. Cutting three or four sticks from a tree, he made a split or cleft in one end of the sticks and in this cleft put squares of birch bark and a few dry twigs. These he gave to each member of the party with instructions to wave them for all they were worth and so keep the bees away from their faces provided they were not put out of commission by the smoke. Near the bottom of the trunk of the bee tree, he gathered dry twigs and brush and piled them up on the ground. His next act was to wet a square of the birch bark and to this he transferred the fuel he had gathered. Then he chopped through the thin shell of the trunk that sheltered the honey-makers, and warning everyone to keep a sharp watch, suddenly thrust the bark "platter" containing the fuel, into the crevice he had made, and fired it with one of the torches. In a short time the bees began to swarm out of the exit at the top of the

blasted trunk. Most of them fell helpless to the ground, a few flew around a bit, but as the bee never flies at night, they were helpless.

When Garry judged that all the bees were out, he began to chop away the trunk, starting at the bees' exit. In a few minutes he had come to the honey. Drawing on his gloves, he advanced to the opening and began to lift out the strips of luscious honeycomb. There were three of these shapeless strips and it was the first time that anyone in the party, including the boys themselves, had ever seen honey other than in the artificial frames that are inserted in the hives in a regular apiary, as a place where bees are kept is called.

"Oh, may I have some?" eagerly asked Miss Carter, and Garry hastened to break off a portion and put it on a bit of bark. It was a brownish gold in color and tasted better than any honey they had ever eaten. The boys did not know it, but bees that get their pollen from goldenrod make perhaps the best honey, although clover honey ranks a close second.

Andrews and the Rangers also tasted the sweet stuff and only wished they had flapjacks then and there to eat with it.

The honey was cached alongside the raspberries that had been picked earlier in the day.

"Now we'll lead you back to your camp and turn in for the night," said Phil.

"I am sorry that I won't be able to offer you a place in the tent," remarked Andrews, "but we traveled just as light as possible, and the tent is now more than comfortably filled."

"Never mind, Mr. Andrews," Garry reassured him, "we have slept in the open many a night and really prefer it to being under cover as long as the weather is fair."

Arriving at the camp, the boys astonished the members of the party with the ease and speed with which they prepared to spend the night on the ground. In a few minutes they had cut a sufficient quantity of light balsam boughs to make a comfortable mattress, and soon were ready to roll in.

Before turning in, however, Garry called Andrews to one side.

"I don't wish to alarm Miss Carter and the other lady, her aunt, I believe you said she was, but I think it would be wise if we maintained a watch to-night. There is a slight possibility that Anderson may still be in this vicinity, waiting to try again for the jewels which he was balked from getting the other time. At any rate, I am convinced he is a dangerous character, and think it well to take precautions. Then, too, there is the chance that he may have hooked up with the halfbreed we told you

about, as there was gossip that he had been instrumental in delivering him from the jail in Millinocket, and I for one don't want LeBlanc to come on me or Dick while we are unawares. We could divide the night in four watches, one apiece for Phil and me, and one each for you and Halleck, the leading man. No one else need be aware of the fact that we are keeping up a guard."

Andrews decidedly agreed with Garry, and calling Halleck over, explained the situation. Halleck promptly offered his services for one watch, and it was decided that Andrews should take first stand at guard, Halleck second, and the Ranger Boys the last two watches in the early hours. This division, Garry explained was because they were used to guard duty, and there was less chance of their falling asleep or even dozing off.

The boys then curled up in their blankets and as they had had a strenuous day, were asleep almost as soon as they lay down.

At midnight, Andrews called Halleck, and turning over the rifle to him, said he had heard or seen nothing suspicious, and that all was well. Halleck filled his pipe and sat with his back against a tree, keeping his ears open for a sound other than the natural noises of the forest night.

Suddenly the whole camp was aroused by the echoing crash of a rifle shot. Garry and Phil were

awake instantly and throwing off their blankets ran to Halleck and asked what he had seen. Before Halleck was able to reply, the rest of the party came out from the tents, and surrounded the little group demanding to know what was the trouble.

Not wishing to alarm the ladies, Halleck simply said he had heard what he thought was an animal crashing through the woods and fired before he thought what he was doing. Fortunately at the time no one thought to ask what he was doing outside the tent at that hour or the morning. The explanation satisfied everyone and soon the camp was still again. After the others had retired, the Rangers and the director gathered around Halleck and asked him what alarmed him to the extent that he fired the rifle.

"I was standing here on watch. I had just filled my pipe again and had come back from the fire and was leaning against the tree, when all of a sudden I heard someone calling in the distance and a moment or two later I heard a reply. I thought at first I would waken you, but then decided to wait a bit and see if it was repeated and anyone came near, then I could call you and we capture the intruders before they could get away.

"I didn't hear anything more for quite a few minutes and was almost beginning to think I had been half dreaming, when I heard the same call, quite

loud and only a few feet from me. Then I guess I got foolish and kind of worried that I hadn't called you three at first and so I just let fly the rifle in the direction of the voice. And that's all there is to tell."

The quartet, led by Garry and Andrews, patrolled the vicinity for several feet and with the aid of one of the pine knots, searched the ground for tracks. Halleck was sure he heard the voice not less than twenty feet away, but there was never a sign of anyone around. They returned to the campfire and had decided to double that watch, two men at a time taking guard, when suddenly Halleck whispered, "there it is again, hear somebody calling?"

Garry and Phil cocked their ears and listened and then broke into a burst of laughter.

"There," said Garry when he could control his mirth, "I guess that evens up for the good laugh you had on us this afternoon when we came to the rescue of the man who was being beaten by bandits or something."

"What do you mean?" chorused Halleck and the director.

"Why," exploded Garry, with difficulty keeping from going into spasms of laughter again, "your person who is calling to someone is nothing more nor less than a common everyday, or rather, every-night hoot owl, calling to its mate!"

CHAPTER X.

MORE TROUBLE.

ANDREWS joined in the laughter as soon as the full force of the joke on his leading man dawned on him. Halleck looked sheepish and then finally joined in the laugh even though the joke was decidedly on him.

"Never mind, Halleck," said Andrews finally. "I probably would have done the same thing had I been in your place and heard that darned owl on the still night air. At that, it does sound like a person except to one who has heard it as many times before as the boys have. I guess, boys, it's every man to his trade. Halleck and I know the movies in and out, and you boys know the woods, so as you say, we'll call it quits for this afternoon."

As it was almost the end of Halleck's watch, Garry told him to turn in and that he would stand guard until it was time to call Phil.

The remainder of the night passed uneventfully both during his tour of duty and that of Phil. When morning came and the two boys compared notes,

they almost agreed that there was no chance of any danger from either of their enemies.

"Still, there can be no harm in not taking chances. I'd rather lose two or three hours' sleep a night than get into a pickle because of negligence," said Garry.

"You're dead right, and I move we keep up the watch for some time to come," agreed Phil.

The sun was well up when breakfast was over and the director gave the order for the retake of the fight. On being assured that it would be done in half an hour, the boys agreed to wait and then conduct the party to the cabin on their land, where they could shoot a few pictures and then proceed to the river bank.

When the director heard that there were rapids in the river and that the boys had shot these rapids several times, he was more than pleased and immediately made plans to revise his scenario so that there could be a scene on the rapids with the boys acting as the paddlers. In response to his query, the Rangers declared they were ready to oblige him any time.

The taking of the fight scene was of great interest to the Rangers. They had never seen the actual filming of a picture and the precise order of working was a revelation. Every move made by the actors was calculated in advance and ordered

by the director. The boys of course had seen some of the best actors on the stage and had thought that the movie people worked in the same way, that is giving their own interpretation to the parts, but they soon found that the director on a "location" was the supreme general.

The great fight scene was filmed this time without any interruption and then the company broke camp and made ready to follow the Rangers to their home section. A number of studio hands had come with the company and these acted as carriers. They were not troubled with clothes as they had dressed for the parts they were taking and all the scenes were of the same nature.

At the bee tree clearing the boys salvaged the honey and raspberries they had cached away and took up the trail toward home. When they reached the 'phone line they hooked up their carrying 'phones and gave Dick a ring. Dick had no news except that his arm was perfectly well again, and that he had sighted no smoke anywhere within range. They had no sooner finished their conversation with Dick when they heard someone hailing them in the distance. The new arrival proved to be the Ranger from the section they had just left.

"Howdy, boys," he called, "I was just heading here to the 'phone line to use the hand 'phone you gave me that time to call you up and warn you that-

there seemed to be prowlers in this section again. Yesterday afternoon someone broke into our cabin and stole a lot of our food supplies. Fortunately they didn't get much, because after hearing of your experience a while ago, we cached a lot of our stuff in a safe place. I wonder if it was the same party or parties who caused you so much trouble that time?"

Garry and Phil looked at each other significantly. Evidently the inimical party was still in that neck of the woods. Then said Garry:

"Your ex-friend Anderson is in these parts. He hired out as a guide to this motion picture company and tried to make off with some of their property and they sent him packing. It is probable that he is the one that helped himself to your food supplies. Only thing that worries us is whether or not he has joined forces with the halfbreed Jean LeBlanc. If he has then we can expect a merry time."

The Ranger was then introduced to the members of the company, and was surprised to learn they had been on his section without his knowing it.

"Although," he said, "I have been patrolling on the other side lately, as there were two camping parties who seemed to have little regard for the fire laws. One crowd finally had to be asked to leave the section or provide themselves with a competent guide. They were quite angry about the matter,

but finally agreed. That is our greatest trouble," he said turning to the movie people. "Campers come here and think that the woods is a place where there is no law. Most of them are all right, but occasionally we get parties of rich people who want to do just as they please. They seem surprised to learn that a Ranger has authority to take them in charge if they refuse to obey the forest fire regulations."

Garry then took up with him the matter of the 'phone line and it was agreed that the matter would be attended to in the next rainy spell. The neighboring Ranger agreed to have glass insulators brought in from town, and he and the lookout man would do the work. Since he was so near the cabin of the boys then, he decided to come over and get the wire.

"You and how many more?" quizzed Garry with a smile. "Do you realize that there is only about a thousand feet of wire in a coil, and that each coil is a pretty heavy load?"

"I think I can solve your problems," interrupted Andrews. "You can have my men to help you as soon as they get our stuff packed to where we are going. We are glad to be of any service that we can in return for what our young friends here are going to do for us while we stay in this part of the country. As I understand it anyway, it will

not have to be carried the entire distance but will be unrolled after you reach a certain point. With my men to help you the job can be done speedily. Have you enough wire?"

"No," answered Garry, "I think there is only enough to reach from our western 'phone line to the bee clearing. Have you any wire, Bob?" he said turning to the other.

"We have about five thousand feet, but can have enough sent in when the insulators come to complete the circuit," answered Bob.

"Then that settles that," declared Garry. "Now for the cabin and some lunch."

The party made good time through the woods and arrived at the shack just as the sun reached the center of the sky.

"Now, Phil, suppose you run up and relieve Dick for a while and let him come down and meet the crowd. Don't let him know we have company, and we'll surprise him a little," directed Garry.

Phil set off at an easy lope up the hillside and Garry and Andrews set about preparing lunch.

"Tonight," said Garry, "we'll have a real, old-fashioned raspberry shortcake, and the only thing lacking will be the whipped cream. We were going to have a squirrel pie, but instead we'll have flap-jacks and honey and bacon, since we ate the squirrels last night."

When Dick came in the cabin he stared in amazement at the crowd of visitors. Introductions were in order and the story of the spoiled film was told for his benefit. He came in for much curious examination by the members of the party when they learned that he had been bitten by the rattlesnake and yet lived through it. Miss Carter shuddered and exclaimed that she would have died of fright, let alone the bite, if she had been the victim of the reptile's bite.

Lunch over, the group started for the river bank, meaning to establish their camp there for the few days they would be filming the woods part of the picture. The final parts would be taken at the studio in New York City, Andrews told the chums who accompanied the actor party to the river.

He also explained what they had not known before, and what few people understand, and that was that the story was not filmed in exact order, but all the scenes in one locality are taken at a time, thus perhaps the first scenes in a picture might be the last ones to come before the eye of the camera.

At last the river bank was reached and the camp established. Garry reminded Andrews that he and the others would have to walk back to the shack if they wanted any of the raspberry shortcake, and the director and the others immediately declared they were ready to walk a greater distance than that

to get such a treat. Andrews finally decided he could leave the workmen in charge of the camp, while he and the small party of actors and Miss Carter and her aunt could come to the cabin for supper and then stay there for the night, returning to the river bank early the following morning.

"Now that we are all here, I wonder if I could get you boys to do a little acting for me at the rapids you speak about," asked Director Andrews.

"All set," called both Dick and Garry.

"You will have to walk up the bank till we come to the rapids," remarked Garry. "You see we have only one canoe and that won't carry eight of us. I would suggest that we take Miss Carter in the canoe, also the cameraman because he has his apparatus to carry with him. We will paddle slowly, and as we have to go against the current upstream, you will have little difficulty in keeping up with us."

This was decided to be the most feasible and practical plan and was accordingly put into execution. The canoe was unearthed from its carefully concealed hiding place in the brush on the bank, and with Garry in the stern, Dick in the bow, and Miss Carter and the cameraman as passengers, the trip to the rapids was commenced.

As Garry had predicted, those who were forced to walk along the bank found little difficulty in keeping up with the water craft, although, as Dick

assured the passengers, they could have left them behind even though they were going against the current, had they been of a mind to do, for both Dick and Garry were old hands with a paddle and had won many prizes in water races.

When they reached the rapids they beached the canoe and prepared for the carry to the upper edge. It was a new experience for some of the city actors, especially the carrying of the canoe, and all were interested in the trip.

Some of them found it hard to believe that the boys would go through the rapids in a frail thing like a canoe and almost looked as though they did not believe it until the boys promised to take any that wanted to make the trip and "shoot" the rapids with them.

"Miss Carter will have a chance to do that then if the boys are willing, because I would like that for one scene. Now what I want is this. Miss Carter, as the heroine, is supposed to have been set adrift in the canoe and sent to death through the rapids. She is supposed to be rescued by the hero, but I am changing the script so as to have two of the Rangers do it. The camera will catch Miss Carter coming down in the canoe, bound and helpless, then you, Garry, if you don't mind my calling you that, will swim out and get into the canoe and shoot the rapids with her if you can do it alone. I

want a long shot of her coming down the river, and when she reaches that point over there, you are to dive in, swim to the rescue and get in the canoe just before it goes into the maelstrom. Think you can do all that?" concluded Andrews.

"Guess we can, but I'd like to make a suggestion and ask a few questions first," responded Garry.

"Go ahead," urged Andrews heartily.

"Right," said Garry. "In the first place you want Dick here to do the rescue act. This for two reasons. He is the better swimmer and second he performed the same kind of a stunt right at this spot only a few days ago."

So it was decided that Dick should be rescuer. Then Garry asked how it was expected that the canoe would come the distance the director wanted it to with Miss Carter helpless in it without overturning.

"That's the easiest thing about the whole afternoon's work. You see we only need flashes of her, and during those flashes, whoever is paddling can crouch in the boat for the half-minute or so that the camera is grinding, and at that distance he cannot be seen. Then when it gets into range and I want the picture of the rescue, the paddler can slip out of the canoe. The rescuer will be out near the point where the canoe will come long before it reaches there, paddling around waiting for it, as the

shot of his swimming out there will be taken separately from the others. So you see how simple it is. Then the camera will be on the canoe all the while that it is going through the rapids, as the telescopic lens will film it at a great distance. After we get through shooting this stuff, the cameraman is going to take some scenic stuff of this river as it is one of the prettiest I have seen in a long while. Now is everything clear. If it is, let's go!"

Everyone understood, so the camera was focused and the director prepared to give the usual order, "Camera," which is the signal for starting, when a distant rumble was heard.

"We'll have to work fast, for I think there is a thunder storm brewing," declared Andrews.

The work of filming the picture went on at a brisk pace, but more than two hours had passed when the picture was finished and the boys returned through the portage, as the trail where they carried the canoe was called. They were resting from their labors when they heard a dog barking vociferously.

"By gracious, that's Sandy's bark. What can he be doing here away from Phil?" asked Garry, jumping to his feet.

In a few minutes Sandy appeared on the scene and made straight for Garry. He was panting fiercely as though he had run for a long time. Garry

stroked the dog's head and then noticed for the first time that there was a note attached to his collar. Garry ripped off the note which he recognized as a leaf from a little notebook that Phil always carried and found this startling message:

"Dear Garry: Score another for the Enemy. Come back at once."

PHIL."

CHAPTER XI.

THE WRECK OF THE CABIN.

GARRY's startled exclamation as he finished reading the note gathered everyone around him.

"What is it, Garry?" asked Dick.

"Search me, old timer. It is a funny message from Phil saying that the enemy is at work again. I wonder if anything has happened to him. Let's get along and make the speediest trip back to the shack that we have ever made. I wonder if Phil was captured and found some way to send that note to us by Sandy?" asked Garry in a worried tone.

"Don't you want me to go along with you?" offered Andrews. "We are finished with the picture for today and the cameraman can take the canoe

and have someone paddle up the river with him to get that scenic stuff that he wants."

The boys accepted his kind offer and after telling the cameraman that he would have to send a couple of men on foot to where the canoe would be cached and bring it back to him as they wanted to save time by going to the cabin trail by water.

"That's O.K.," responded the cameraman. "I particularly want some sunset stuff, so the little delay will make no difference."

With Andrews as a passenger, the rapids were negotiated in a short time, and bending to their paddles the chums sent the canoe speeding down the river as though their lives depended on it. Fear of what might have happened to Phil gave them an added desire to hurry. In quick time they reached the point where the trail led to the home cabin, and hastily storing the canoe away in its customary brush hiding place, set off at a dog trot for home. Andrews was of an athletic nature and had no trouble in keeping up with them.

At last they reached the clearing where the cabin stood and what a sight met their astonished eyes. For where the cabin should have stood was only a jumble of shattered logs, a veritable wreck.

Phil, rifle in hand, ran to meet them and was immediately plied with questions as to the reason for the disastrous sight.

"I haven't the slightest idea what it's all about. All I know is that while I was up in the 'tin can,' I heard a rattling explosion and hustled down here, not knowing what to expect, and found this wreck. I have prowled around seeking some sort of a clue and can find nothing except a little wire some feet out there in the woods. It is plain to see that the cabin was dynamited. I know of only one person in this state that would do that and that is Jean LeBlanc, and mark my words, he is somewhere in this vicinity. I would have gone on to get you myself, but thought it better to be here on guard, and so thought of Sandy. There is the smartest dog in creation. I tied the note to his collar and then simply said, 'Go and find Garry,' and after pointing him down the trail and repeating the commands a few times, he started out hotfoot, and as one can see, found you all right. He must have made record time in going after you. That's all I know."

"Well, you boys seem to be in for more adventure in a short time than most people encounter in a lifetime," commented Andrews. "Now what are you going to do? You have no home and no food, and nothing to sleep on."

"No, we aren't so bad off as that," said Garry. "We have our clothes with us, and a blanket, as we took our packs with us when we went with you to

the river. We can borrow enough food from you till we get word to town to send us new supplies, and there you are. Phil is the only one who is out of luck, for his knapsack was blown up with the cabin."

"That's where you are wrong, Garry, for if you remember, I went up the hill to relieve Dick without stopping to take off the sack and it's up in the 'tin can' now," said Phil.

"And here's something else, Garry," said Dick breaking into the conversation. "Yesterday I got thinking of the time that the cabin was looted of food by LeBlanc, and made two trips, carrying a fair amount of provisions to the lookout shack, so we can make out all right till food can be sent from Millinocket."

"Listen," said Andrews, "you know that time I said we'd have to hurry because I heard thunder? I thought it funny that the storm did not come and now I know it must have been the explosion that we heard instead of thunder. It's sure a lucky thing that one of you was not in the cabin when it was dynamited."

"There was no chance of that, because some little work was necessary to fix it so it would blow up. The dynamite sticks had to be put under the cabin; I imagine two were used, and these had to be covered up with moss or mud or something, and then

the wires connected to the percussion cap and the explosive had to be carried a little distance where the switch could be thrown on. A small box with a single battery was all that was needed. It has all the earmarks of LeBlanc, because he has worked on the river, and dynamite is frequently used to blow out the key log in a big log jam, such as you know often happens in the high water when they are floating logs down the river. One or two logs get caught in such a way that they form something like the keystone in an arch, and then there is a mighty big tangle in less time than it takes to tell. The only way to start the logs going again if the jam is a bad one, is to blow out this key log with dynamite," explained Garry.

"If that's the case then," interrupted Dick, "LeBlanc must have come here with the express intention of causing us annoyance if he went to all the trouble of carrying dynamite and a battery switch here. I am now dead certain that LeBlanc and Anderson have joined forces, for here are two parties that have run afoul of them in the past few days."

Suddenly Garry burst out with "Where's our pet bear? Was he killed? No, he couldn't be, for there is no sign of his body. He must have been loosed by the vandals that blew up the shack, and I am surprised to think that a man who would do

such a trick would have the kindness to loosen the bear. Well, all we can do is to wait and see if the bear was tame enough so that he'll come back to us. It's dollars to doughnuts that he will, for he seemed quite tractable yesterday and appeared to be content. Well, the next thing to do is to take council as to what we shall do about a new home. If it wasn't that the water was here for cooking and drinking and bathing, I would suggest that we make our new place right up near the 'tin can,' but it would mean carry water a long way, and that would be tiresome, so the best thing to do seems to be to rebuild right here," concluded Garry.

A council of war was held, and the first thing done was to take stock of the situation. They searched through the ruins and found that the damage was not as great as was to be expected. The charge of dynamite had been only sufficient to tear down the cabin, but it was found that much of the lumber could be gotten out and used again. They found the skillet and some of the cooking utensils, battered and bent, but still serviceable. Many of the logs, especially on the two sides where the dynamite had evidently been placed were badly shattered, while others were all right. The roof was almost intact.

"I think," said Garry, after he had looked things over carefully, "that we had better start and cut

down some small timber, pull out what logs are usable from the wreck here, and build the sides up again, blocking up the roof as we put up the sides. Of course, there are other things that we could do if we were to be here only temporarily, but since we are destined to stay here for the remainder of the summer, we might as well do it shipshape and proper. I say, Andrews, do you suppose we could hire your helpers for a day after we have everything ready to raise the roof? It could easily be done in that time."

"You certainly can have them as long as you need them, and you won't have to hire them either. I'll be glad to donate their services to you. But I'd like to ask a question. I thought that you built only one kind of a cabin, and yet you said there were several things you could do. What, for instance?" asked Andrews.

"Oh, there are any number of things. For instance, we could build a brush cabin. That is done by raising four corner poles with cross pieces attached to the upper ends, the two front poles being longer than the two rear ones, so that you could have a slanting roof. Then at intervals down the sides, more slender rails could be attached, and then a great quantity of small boughs cut. These would be hung on the cross pieces and sort of weaved in and out, and one would have a very serviceable fair-

weather house. Of course, it would not be storm proof and that would be uncomfortable as there are some heavy rains occasionally in these woods.

"Then we could build what is known in some parts of the country as a hogan or rail shack. This is done by setting up double poles, so as to form a kind of a slot, with about two inches space between each pole. Then long slender rails are slipped into this slot, one resting on top of the other until the desired height is reached. More saplings are laid across the top to form the roof. The outside of this is then sodded and a thatched roof of boughs made. There is only one objection to that, and that is it takes quite a little time to cut the great number of slender poles that are needed. However, if a person were alone in the woods that is the only logical thing to build, as it can be done by one person, and there are no heavy weights to lift, such as these logs with which this cabin was built. Or we might find a cave and live in that, or we could find a bank, and chop and dig away one side until we had a sheer wall, and then build three sides against it. That is often practical, because then one can build a fireplace in the dirt wall, and line it with clay. A rousing fire is then built in it, and the clay bakes sufficiently to make a fine fireplace. Oh, there are any number of things one could do in the woods

with an axe and plenty of trees," and Garry concluded his long explanation.

Andrews was amazed at the fertility of suggestions as to how one could house himself in the forests. Asked why they were going to rebuild their old cabin as near the same possible style as it was, Garry explained that they could cut a sufficient number of logs in a day to patch out what was needed. Then a few hours would be needed for the cutting of the joints, then there was only the matter of raising the logs, and this could be done easily through the kindness of the director in offering the services of his men.

It was dusk by the time the council was ended, and Andrews remarked that he could tell by his hollow feeling that it was suppertime. He suggested that they return to his camp on the river bank, but the boys surprised him further by saying they could prepare supper right then and there, since they had their packed rations and utensils that they used on their patrol trips.

Spiderbread and coffee were made and a few minutes' work with a fish line netted enough trout for a delicious meal. Fortunately, the honey and raspberries had not been left in the cabin but had been cached near the watering place before they had started for the river bank, and this with the fresh spiderbread was a supper fit for a king.

Supper over, they fished around in the ruins, and were fortunate enough to find the blankets practically unhurt. About a half an hour's work of pulling away the logs enabled them to get at the blankets on the crushed bunks.

The quartet sat around the campfire while Director Andrews told them stories of the studios and about actors and actresses they had often seen on the screen, and with many of whom Director Andrews had worked.

Finally the straggling moonbeams began to peep down, and rolled in their blankets, laid close to the dying embers of fire, they were soon fast asleep after the strenuous day. Dick's last words before he closed his eyes were:

"Well, tomorrow's another day and then, ho for LeBlanc and his tribe, let 'em come!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAMERA CLUE.

THE quartet was up before sunrise, and after a hasty breakfast, Andrews departed for his camp, promising to send some of his people that he could spare that day to help the boys.

"Tell them each to bring an axe if possible, and then they can help us notch the ends of the logs," called Garry after the departing director.

"Righto, see you again soon," called back Andrews.

The trio lost no time in preparing to cut down some small trees. Garry estimated hastily the amount that would be needed and then went into the woods, circling around near the cabin so that the logs would not have to be carried any great distance. Whenever he reached a tree that was of the proper size he cut a small notch in it to indicate that it was to be cut down.

Dick had salvaged the heavy axe, that they used for the cutting of firewood, from the ruins, and he followed Garry, felling the trees in speedy fashion. Last came Phil, using his hand axe to trim the branches from the fallen trees.

Dick put in an hour of this and then left to take a spell in the lookout cabin. It was arranged that Phil should relieve him at noon, and thus get a rest from the arduous labor of cutting and chopping. Garry was elected to stay continuously on the scene to direct the work of getting out logs for the repair of the cabin.

The work went steadily on until an hour before noon, when four of the movie company appeared on the scene, carrying axes, and one a saw used in

one of the scenes that had been filmed a day or two before.

As soon as Garry noticed the saw, he cried jubilantly:

"That saw is going to cut our work just about in half. You see I originally thought that we would have to cut semi-circular grooves in the logs with the axes, so that each notch would form a resting place for the round logs," he explained to the men.

"Now, however, we can do a much easier thing. We can hoist a log up on a set of blocks, and then, at a point about six inches from the end, saw half-way through the log. One or two blows of the axe then at the end of the log will cut out the segment, leaving us a perfect flat sided joint, the logs fitting together then in pairs. Once we get going it will be no job at all to have a new cabin."

"That's all right, boss," exclaimed one of the movie helpers, but there's going to be a lot of holes and cracks when the logs are piled up. What are you going to do about that?"

"Just what has been done to log shacks since they were built, stuff the chinks tightly with moss. Then you have an absolutely weather proof cabin. Of course, when settlers made permanent log huts for homes, they generally sheathed the inside with boards, but it would take too long a time to hand hew boards from these tree trunks."

His explanation satisfied the questioner, and then the work was apportioned out. Garry and Phil continued their cutting and trimming, while the four extra helpers were set at work clearing away the debris of the wrecked shack. This was accomplished by lunch time and they knocked off to prepare to eat. The helpers had thoughtfully brought some lunch along, knowing that the boys were short of provisions, and a few fish were caught to eke out the cold lunch. These were wrapped in leaves and baked to a turn in the embers of the campfire.

Dick came down the mountain in time to eat, and as soon as Phil had finished lunch he took Dick's place at the mountain top. Sandy, the big Airedale who seemed disconsolate since the nefarious blowing up of the cabin, elected to go up the hill with Phil.

Lunch was hardly over when Andrews appeared on the scene. He asked Garry about telephoning a message to a telegraph office, explaining that they had, because of a mistake in their calculation, run out of the film negative used in the camera and would need some brought to them post haste.

Garry told him he would have to climb the hill and telephone a message to Nate Webster who would take care of the telegram for him.

"You are going to need a guide eventually," said Garry, "so why don't you have Nate get Silas Pea-

body for you? Then Peabody can bring in the film when he treks into the woods."

Andrews agreed that this was the very best thing to do and set off for the "tin can." As he left he told the boys that he was glad to make the climb for he wanted to see just what method was used in spotting fires.

"While you are up there you can cast your eye at the latest thing in forest protection," said Dick, "and that is our new wireless telephone outfit."

The director turned around and came back. "Have you really got a wireless up in these parts?" he asked. "That happens to be a hobby of mine, wireless transmitting, both by telegraph and telephone."

"That's great luck," chimed in Garry. "Perhaps you can take a couple of hours and assemble the carrying 'phones and antennae standards for us. I haven't had a chance to finish what I started on account of the events of the past two or three days."

"There is nothing that I would like better," answered Andrews, "and you won't see me again until I have put everything in apple pie order for you. You must have a very wonderful and somewhat costly set if you have individual carrying 'phones, and I will be interested in working on it."

"Go to it, it will help us greatly and oblige me more than I can tell you," responded Garry as Andrews started off.

The work then went along with a snap, and so speedy was the progress that by mid-afternoon, everything was in readiness for the laying in place of the logs.

First of all a narrow trench in the shape of a square was scooped out and in this was laid four logs. For this they used logs salvaged from the wreck of the original cabin. Then the logs were laid until all those left after the explosion that were fit to use were in place. These proved to be enough to build up the walls to almost two-thirds of the necessary height.

The remainder would be the logs that the boys had cut, trimmed and notched for joints. Finally they reached the distance of what was to be the rear wall. Then one of the movie men popped up with another question.

"Look here, what are you going to do about a slanting roof? The way the logs are laid now, you have the same height all the way around, and I understood you to say that the front would be higher than the back. Isn't that going to leave you a triangular open space?"

"Not a bit of it," said Garry. "All that is necessary to be done is to take the axe and hew on the end of a log so that there will be a long flat slanting face, each log being shorter than the one under it, and that will give you a tightly fitting side wall."

It must be explained here that when the rear wall was built the logs were so cut that there was a square hole at the bottom, about four feet each way. This was to make the new fireplace.

The original roof was of hewed boards, and as was explained before, was left nearly intact after the explosion. There were several broken places, but these could easily be patched. The only hard thing was the hewing of a flat surface on a few small trunks.

The boards were laid in place and fastened tightly to the logs with spikes that had been retrieved from the wreck of the cupboard where the supplies and odds and ends had been kept.

While the outfit had been working one of the men had wandered a little ways into the woods. He had been gone but a few moments when he came tearing back.

"Get a gun!" he shouted, "quick, bring your guns! There's a bear there in the woods and he came straight at me. He's a maneater I tell you."

Garry sprang for his rifle, and led by the man ran into the woods, the others following close behind. Garry soon saw the bear and then began to laugh for he realized that it was the bear that they had caught in the tree.

"Here's a chance to see if he's at all tame, Dick.

Run back and get a little of the honey we cached away."

Then he turned to the others and explained that it was an animal they had caught and partly tamed. The others soon began to poke fun at the chap who had run back shouting that a maneater was after him. The bear seemed undecided what to do, but seemed to recognize Garry. Seeing that no one approached him or made any threatening moves he squatted on his haunches and gravely surveyed the group.

"Don't jump up suddenly or make any loud noises unexpectedly," cautioned Garry, and soon we'll see what it's all about." Dick returned shortly with a small chunk of honey which he gave Garry. Holding the luscious morsel in his outstretched hand, Garry slowly walked toward the bear. At first he thought the animal was going to beat a hasty retreat, but a bear's smelling powers are strongly developed and he smelt the honey. He allowed Garry to approach him and after getting a good sniff at the honey, rapturously began to lick it from Garry's hand. This seemed to be the one thing needed to show him absolutely that these strange man creatures were friends and not enemies after all, and he allowed Garry to pat him on the head.

Garry then turned away and began to retreat slowly. The bear watched him for a moment and

then followed him in a hurry, sniffing at and licking the hand that held the honey, and almost seemed to be asking for more.

"There, I think we have him safe and sound now," observed Garry. He led the way directly to the cabin and finding a piece of wire, attached it to the collar they had put on him the day of his capture and which had been left on him by the man or men that had freed him before the cabin was dynamited. Then Garry twisted one end of the wire about a tree near the newly built shack and the bruin was again a captive. He did not seem to mind it at all however, but sat down contentedly and began to lick his chops to see if he could get another taste of the delicious honey. Mr. Bruin is fonder of honey than of anything else and they have been known to be stung to blindness and consequent death by trying to get the contents of a bee tree in the woods.

"Tomorrow I am going to try an experiment by untying the wire leash and seeing if he will make a break for liberty or hang around. And if he does break for the woods, we can see if he will come back. If he does, we won't tie him up again, but let him have complete freedom to come and go as he pleases around the woods," said Garry.

There remained but a few minutes more of light, and this was utilized in putting in place the stones

that had formed the original fireplace. This could not be used yet until a trip had been made to the river bank.

"Why is that?" asked one of the men when Garry remarked this.

"Because we must have some clay, and I noticed a bank of it on the other side of the river one day. We'll all have to make a trip over and bring back a sufficient quantity to smear the inside of the stone fireplace thoroughly. Then we'll start a rousing fire, and the clay will bake sufficiently to give us a perfectly air tight fireplace and chimney," answered Garry.

"Well, I'll take my hat off to you boys," said one of the men. "If I was faced with what you chaps were yesterday, I'd have given up and headed for a city, the biggest one I could find. You fellows are sure there with knowing what to do in the woods. Catching bears, finding about thirty dollars worth of honey and knowing how to get it without being stung to death, and building a cabin with an axe and a lot of trees. It's too much for me."

"Now what ho for supper," cried Dick. "I am so hungry I could eat the bark from a tree."

At this point Andrews and Phil came down from the mountain-top.

"How about supper," they shouted together. "We've got the wireless all ready to work and An-

draws went off a few hundred feet and we tested it out, and it works perfectly," cried Phil breathlessly.

Phil had thought to bring some provisions down from the shack, and also told Garry that he had ordered a supply of food to be brought in when Silas Peabody came into the woods with the film for the cameraman.

"He will have to have an extra man to help him tote the stuff, but Nate said he would take care of all that," said Phil in conclusion.

After supper they heaped wood on the fire and laid around while Garry told the movie men the story of their capture of the bear. While the story was in the telling they heard some one coming down the trail. It proved to be the cameraman.

As soon as he came to the group he turned to Garry and Andrews and said:

"I've a funny piece of news. You know this morning I went up river a ways and took some more scenic stuff. Then I tried out the effect of taking scenics with the telescopic lens, getting some long shots, sweeping both sides of the river. I was so anxious to see how the thing turned out that I picked out a few bits of the film and developed it. Then I contrived to make a darkroom in one of the tents, and using the portable projector, threw a bit of the negative on a makeshift screen."

For the benefit of our readers who of course do

not know of the many tricks of the movie trade, it must be explained that a developed but unprinted negative can be thrown on a screen. Of course it is dark and hard to see, but a trained movie man can see it perfectly, due to his long training, just as the long practice of a printer enables him to read type backwards and upside down just as easily as he would a printed newspaper.

"So to make a long story short, I got some good results and one startling revelation. On one of the bits I developed of a spot away up the river, I found that there were two men in the picture." He paused for a minute to let the words sink in.

"One of those men was Anderson, the guide that we fired, and the other was a tall heavy set, hairy-looking chap, resembling an Indian, dressed in a woodsman's clothes," he concluded dramatically.

"Jean LeBlanc!" shouted the three boys in unison.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HERMIT WRITES A NOTE.

"JEAN LEBLANC!" echoed Garry. "Well, chums, I guess that definitely settles the perpetrator of the dynamite outrage here. I should say the war was on again, although it seems equally safe to think

that the pair may be making for taller timber and only stopped off to cause us a lot of annoyance before they fled. At any rate, it behooves us to watch our step every minute of the time, especially the man in the lookout who is always alone. For the present we shall be in and around where the movie people are and I don't think our friends, the enemy, will attempt anything with such a force of numbers against them. Then, too, LeBlanc cannot stay too long in these parts. He is subject to arrest and there are too many chances of some guide recognizing him. And some of those old fellows would just as soon take a pot shot at him and ask questions afterwards as not. Anyway, we do sentry duty from now on. And to think that we get a warning from the camera. That was certainly fortunate, for it tells us at least that the two are now companions in crime and that they are or at least have been in this vicinity. Let 'em come. I'd just like to get that LeBlanc in custody again before he does something that will cause somebody untold harm. He is absolutely without conscience and just plumb no good. Well, let's turn in. Dick, you take the first watch, Phil the second and I'll take the last watch. We might just as well get used to it now as later."

The movie people protested that they should share in the sentry duty, but were overruled by Garry,

who stated that they had been of great help to them already and they were under deep enough obligations. Andrews and his companions decided to stay there for the night, rather than walk through the dark back to their camp.

The night passed uneventfully, although the boys on watch kept a sharp lookout at every moment in order that they might not be caught napping. Sandy seemed to sense the feeling of watchfulness, for every little while he would leave his place by the fire and walk about the clearing, coming back from his uneasy tour to get a pat from the sentry, and then return to his spot by the fire.

There is an old saying that the darkest hour is just before the dawn. This is especially true in the woods, for the blackness seems to become more intense. This is especially the case when there is no moon and the stars seem to pale.

Garry was on this last lonely watch when suddenly he heard a crash some little distance in the woods. He wondered at first if it was not a tree branch falling, or perhaps some animal. He called Sandy softly and the dog came close to him, pricking up his ears and listening. For some moments they stood thus, dog and boy, both on guard.

Finally Garry decided that it was only one of the myriad noises of the great forests.

"Go and lay down, old fellow," he told Sandy, giving the dog a hearty pat on the head.

Sandy waited a moment and was slowly returning to his nook by the fire when the identical noise was repeated. With the hair rising on his back, and giving a low growl, Sandy dashed in the direction of the noise. Garry paused only long enough to rouse Phil with a slight kick as he went by him. Phil was on his feet in an instant, and without stopping to ask questions, leaped to his feet, and grabbing his rifle which he had kept close beside him as he slept followed Garry in the direction Sandy had taken.

They found Sandy ranging around in circles, his nose close to the ground, but there was no sign of either human being or animal, nor could they see any fallen branches that would have accounted for the crashing noise. Just as they were about to give up the search, Sandy growled and the chums turned to find him snuzzling about something in the darkness. There was a faint light coming from the campfire some distance away, for just before the strange noise Garry had thrown a fresh lot of wood on the embers, against the need of a fire to prepare breakfast as soon as dawn broke.

The object proved to be a rock about as big as a man's clenched fist.

"What a fool dog you are, Sandy," chided Garry.

"Haven't you ever seen a stone in the woods before?"

Sandy's only answer was another throaty growl.

"Say, listen, Garry," said Phil. "You know that Sandy has almost the acute smell of a hound. I am certain that he smells a human touch on that stone as though someone had thrown it there. Don't you think I'm right? Sandy would not be wanting to play with that stone in the darkness. I am positive that stone was thrown to draw us out into the woods, and I for one think we'd better get back to the light of the fire so that we can see what we are doing. I wouldn't relish an attack in the darkness."

Good advice, Phil, discretion is always the better part of valor and we are too far from our reinforcements. Come, Sandy, about face and back to the fire."

They beat a retreat to the spot where the others were sleeping on the ground, and as it was almost dawn, Phil decided to remain up and set about getting things ready for breakfast.

Dawn broke and the coffee was put on to boil. Its aroma spread through the little camp and soon everyone was up and bustling about. Andrews announced that they would work hunting for locations during the day, and preparing for more shooting as soon as the film arrived which they expected

would be on the following noon, as Silas Peabody was a skilled woodsman and would easily make the hike in two days or perhaps a little less, for he would have started by that time since the film could have been wired for to Portland.

Breakfast over, Andrews and his men departed and the boys remained to patch up their bunks and restore things to as shipshape a condition as possible in the new cabin. They told Andrews they would be along about noon to get clay from the river bank with which to rebuild the fireplace.

It was Garry's turn to take the lookout on the mountain top, and he set out after cautioning his chums to keep their weather eye peeled for trouble and not to be caught napping. For some reason Sandy did not want to go with him, but stalked about the camp, sniffing at the ground and running to one of the boys every now and then, looking as though he wanted to tell them something of great importance. Of course, Garry could have ordered him to come, and like the good dog he was he would have obeyed unhesitatingly. Garry, however, decided that the dog knew something and left him behind, telling his chums to order Sandy to head for the "tin can" when they left for the river.

The boys had been working about the cabin, putting in such bunks as they could from the smashed pieces of the ones that had been part of the old

cabin, when Sandy came leaping through the door, and going to Phil who was the nearest, caught him by the sleeve with his teeth and started to pull him towards the door. Phil followed, instantly realizing that the dog had made some discovery.

The big Airedale led the way to the rear of the cabin which the boys had not been near that morning, since there was nothing that would take them to that spot, and there found Sandy's discovery. It was an old cloth bag which on being opened, was found to contain a half a dozen squirrels, neatly skinned and wrapped in big leaves. With them was a folded paper.

"By gracious, Dick, come out here!" he shouted to the chum in the cabin.

Dick hastened out inquiring as to the cause of his companion's excitement.

"I haven't opened this, but I'll bet a hat that it is a note from our old friend the note writer," said Phil. "And here are some squirrels, evidently meant for our consumption. That's just like the old fellow, he seems to know everything that's going on and that we have been running low on provisions since we were **B**low'n out of house and home."

"Well, don't make a speech about it, but open up the note and see what it says. I am curious to see what the word is this time," laughed Dick.

The note was opened and Phil began to read it,

Dick looking over his shoulder. They read the note through, which was on paper this time instead of the customary birch bark and was written with a pencil instead of charcoal as on former occasions when the mysterious visitor whom they had never seen had communicated with them.

When the note was read, both boys were silent a moment and then burst into laughter.

"Well, if that doesn't take the cake. His notes have been cryptic enough before, but at least they were understandable; why this is nothing but a jumble of words. If I ever needed any proof that our friend is a little bit off, this is it," commented Dick.

Indeed was the note a strange affair. It seemed to consist only of a jumble of words, of which no sense could be made. The note was as follows:

"Do seek sign but you and my which not ye notes
point

wonder shall go you that find straight must you
how as find never do the out see compass for
me always says yourself."

The note was written in a neat hand, almost like the copperplate effect that is possessed by studious people, such as lawyers or ministers or teachers.

The chums had experience with the old writer's notes and so they searched through this one for a

hidden meaning. But it was impossible to find. All previous notes had been worded peculiarly, but they always made sense and it was only necessary to puzzle a few seconds to find out what the symbolic words that the hermit used were meant to denote.

It was not the case with this one. They were plain every day words, but scattered along with no meaning, no rhyme or reason.

"I give it up," finally announced Phil. "I wonder if we ought to run up and show it to Garry?"

"Don't think it's worth while. If he wanted to give us a message of warning he would have come right out and said something definite. Let's get going on the way to the claybank, so that we can have our fireplace ready for cooking as soon as possible. We can show it to Garry this evening, but it won't do much good, for I don't think Garry can make head or tail of this any more than we can."

In the meantime, Sandy had been circling round and when he saw the boys getting ready to leave the spot he set up a loud barking and began to run along with his nose to the ground, following what evidently was a trail or some scent. The boys were immediately interested and followed the dog. The trail led to the place where they got their water, the mountain brook. Here the note writer had evidently come, and knowing that the boys possessed

a dog, had waded through the brook at a shallow place, thus destroying all scent. This is a sure way to foil a dog. Foxes, when they are being hunted often do it to elude the pack that is following them.

Crestfallen, Sandy led the way back to the house and on being ordered to go and find Garry, started up the hill toward the "tin can," or lookout cabin. Phil and Dick made their way along the trail to the river bank. Dick was silent so long that Phil asked the reason.

"I am thinking about that note. I never knew the old hermit to fool us before, and I can't help thinking there is something back of that note. What it is I mean to find out," said Dick in response.

"You're only wasting your time. The old fellow is just a harmless, mentally deranged person, and you'll find that is all that is back of your note," answered Phil.

They strode along some little distance in silence, then suddenly Dick cried out:

"I believe I've got it!"

"You've got it bad. What is it?" ridiculed Phil.

"The answer to that mysterious note. You remember last winter in English class we read Edgar Allen Poe's Gold Bug? Does that bring anything to your mind?"

Phil studied for a minute or two and then said:

"Why you don't mean you think it's—"

"Eaxactly," interrupted Dick. "It's a note written in cipher!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HERMIT'S CIPHER.

"WHY, then, there's one thing to do and that is to wait until we get back and show it to Garry," said Phil. "You remember he made a little bit of a hobby out of deciphering codes last winter, and you remember that we laughed at him at the time. He didn't go very far into the subject, but I don't imagine that our hermit friend would write a very complicated one. What stumps me is how he knew any one of us could read a cipher."

"I don't believe he does know about our being acquainted with the matter. It is just one of the peculiar whims of his twisted mind, perhaps his idea of a little practical joke on us. Well, the joke will be on him if Garry succeeds in deciphering it. I wonder what the thing says anyway. Let's see that note again," answered Dick.

Phil handed the note over and they walked along; he poured over it, but the longer he looked at it the

more senseless it seemed and finally he gave it up in despair.

"There's probably some keyword in there somewhere, which if one knew, one could swap the letters of the words and read it easily. All I know about ciphers is that the letter E is the one that is most used. Cipher experts call it the frequency of occurrence. There are plenty of e's in this, but blest if I can make it out."

"Stop worrying about it and let's shake a foot and put on some speed. I am sure that Garry will be able to read the thing after he studies it a bit, and at the present the thing we want to do is to get that clay and make for home again. I suppose we are wasting time that should be used for patrolling, but then we are covering a certain amount of ground everyday and in that fashion are doing a part of our duty. It would be all right if this late matter took us occasionally to the north, for we haven't been there in some days. Tomorrow I think we ought to make a patrol there as we will have nothing to do to keep us at home," concluded Phil.

"Best thing to do," agreed Phil and in a short time they found themselves at the river bank.

"Shall we take a run upstream a bit and see how our friends are making out?" inquired Phil.

"No, let's get this clay back and finish up the

fireplace and that will clean up our work of rebuilding the shack," suggested Dick.

"Right you are, business before pleasure," agreed his chum.

They had noticed the patch of clay near the spot where the canoe was cached early in their stay in the woods. The question of transporting it was soon settled. Two long sticks were procured. Then Dick took off his coat and buttoned it up. The coat was then turned inside out and the sleeves were of course on the inside. Phil followed suit.

Through the sleeves the poles were then thrust and they had a suitable carrier, much like a litter used for carrying a sick person, and indeed, this is the easiest and most satisfactory litter that can be made to carry an injured person on.

Several small boughs were then cut and laid over the coats so that the clay would not daub the cloth all up. Using their hatchets in lieu of picks, they soon cut away several good sized chunks of the clay and laid in on the bough-covered coats. When they judged that they had a sufficient quantity, they stationed themselves, one at each end of the pair of poles and then lifted the handles that projected beyond the coats to their shoulders. Thus they had an easy riding carrier.

The journey home was made in slower time than on the way over, due of course, to the fact that they

had a burden this time, but they reached the new cabin about midafternoon, and started immediately on the work of lining the fireplace. This was a simple matter, as all that was necessary to do was to take handfuls of the soft clay and daub it on the sides of the fireplace and part way up the short chimney. All that was left to do was to smooth it over with a small piece of board. The last step was to get a great number of dry saplings and line the clay with these, pressing them slightly into the still soft clay.

Then a rousing fire was started and the advantage of putting these sticks over the clay becomes apparent. As soon as there was a big enough fire in the new fireplace, the lining of sticks began to burn, and as they gradually fell away, the heat was found to have hardened the clay to quite an extent. The stick had prevented the clay from hardening too rapidly and cracking or falling away from the stones. This done, the fire was smothered and a slower fire allowed to start.

By nightfall the clay was fairly well hardened and began to take on a slight reddish appearance, as do the bricks in a brick burning kiln. For the benefit of some of our boy readers who may be making a long stay in the woods on a camping trip, a fine fireplace can be made if a barrel is procurable. Just make a platform of clay and then knock out three

or four of the staves of the barrel so that it will rest firmly on the platform and not roll off. Then completely cover the barrel which was of course laid on its side, and not on end, with clay. One end of the barrel is daubed over with clay, and the other left open, to be the front of the fireplace. Then start your fire inside the barrel. As the staves burn away the clay will become sufficiently hard to retain its circular shape. Be careful after the staves have burned away not to have too brisk a flame, just let a slow fire burn in it for some hours and you have an excellent fireplace. A circular hole may be left in the top for a chimney if desired.

But one thing remained to complete the work on the cabin. This was the stuffing up of the chinks that were left at the joints of the logs and between the logs in several spots. This was done by stuffing moss into the holes and cracks, hammering the soft moss home with the backs of their hatchets. This took only a little time and soon the new shack was absolutely weatherproof and completely ready for occupancy.

Darkness fell as soon as they had completed the work and they could hear Garry and Sandy coming down the hillside. Supper was being prepared when he came in and as they sat about the meal, Dick told of the finding of the note, apparently

from the old hermit and their failure to make head or tail out of it.

The note was handed over to Garry and he only glanced at it when he said:

"What makes you think it's from the hermit?"

"Why, who else would write us peculiar notes like that?" asked Dick.

"And why do you question the fact that it's from him?" chimed in Phil.

"I just happened to notice first that it does not bear his usual cryptic signature. You remember how all the others ended, with a crude drawing of a pine and boulder with a big X on it, and this one has neither the drawing or any sort of a written signature. Of course, your point is well taken, that no one else would write to us, and least of all in such a hodgepodge as this, or deliver it with such secrecy. That must have been what the commotion was all about last night. He saw that there was someone on guard and wanted to draw them away. So all he had to do was stand some distance away, to the windward of course, so Sandy would not smell him, and then toss the rocks crashing through the trees. Of course, we dashed into the woods and while we were there he slipped up to the cabin and left the squirrels and the note there and made a quick retreat back into the woods where he came from. The reason Sandy was so eager to watch

that stone was that it had the scent of the hermit on it. So that's accounted for."

"Do you think it's a cipher, Garry, or just a crazy scribbling?" eagerly asked Dick.

"Offhand, I should say that you were right and that it was written in code, but I will have to study it over first and be sure. So just you chaps let me alone for a while and I'll set to work on it," answered Garry.

Phil and Dick got out the pocket checkerboard that Garry's father had given them before they left home and were soon deep in a game while Garry worked in silence. He had rummaged through his knapsack and dug out a pencil and a few scraps of paper.

Once in a while one of the others would lift up his head from the checker game and inquire if he had made any progress. Each time the answer was the same, that he hadn't got the combination yet.

At the end of almost an hour, he leaned back and surveyed the result of his labors with complete satisfaction and contentment. The others immediately threw aside the checkerboard and eagerly awaited the result of the deciphering.

"Yes, it's a note from the hermit," began Garry, "and it is a virtual challenge to us, which we will take up later. Now would you like to have me explain how I worked out the cipher?"

"Let her go, Garry," said his chums almost in the same voice.

"Well, in the first place I thought it was what is known as a substitution cipher, that is the substituting of one letter for another, but after a few minutes decided that this was not so, for each word, while having apparently no connection with the others, was a complete, correctly spelled word, which is seldom the case with a substitution cipher, which generally consists of a jumble of letters.

"That meant that it must be one of two other kinds, either a code, in which each word stood for another, or a route cipher, which meant that if the words were read in a certain order, they would form complete sentences. The idea of its being a code was out of the question, for it is apparent that our mysterious friend wanted us to know the contents of his message and he would not have sent a code knowing that we did not possess a copy of his code book."

"That left the one other type of the three great classes of ciphers, a route cipher. From then on the going was easy. I counted the words first and found that there were thirty-six. Now thirty-six has several divisors, such as three and twelve, six and six, or nine and four. That meant that the message was capable of being divided in a number of ways, either three lines of twelve words each, six

lines of six words each, four lines of nine words, and their opposites, such as nine lines of four words each. I tried them all out and got no result until I came to the last combination group, which was nine lines of four words each. All that was necessary to do then was to lay the words out in the proper group, and this was the result that I got," finished Garry, handing a slip of paper over to his chums.

| | | | |
|--------|--------|----------|------------|
| Do | seek | sign | but |
| you | and | my | which |
| not | ye | notes | point |
| wonder | shall | go | you |
| that | find | straight | must |
| you | how | as | find |
| never | I | the | out |
| see | do | compass | for |
| me | always | says | yourselves |

"All I did," said Garry, "was to take each nine words and put them under each other, taking them in succession. Then as you can see for yourselves, all that was necessary was to read down each line. Thus it was shown that the route to be taken, from which the cipher gets its name, was to read every fourth word. This you can see for yourselves from this paper on which the proper message is written: Here is the final translation of the cipher:"

"Do you not wonder that you never see me? Seek and ye shall find. How do I always sign

my notes? Go straight as the compass says, but which point you must find out for yourselves."

"The punctuation I put in myself, as that was easy to do after the cipher had been translated," remarked Garry.

"Well, the whole point is this," commented Phil. "Our mysterious friend has evidently challenged us to come and find him, likely no easy matter. All that remains to ask is, do we go and find him?"

"The Ranger Boys never take a challenge without doing their utmost to win," said Garry. "I move that the next business on the calendar is to go and smoke him out. What say, fellows?" concluded Garry.

Phil and Dick were unanimous in their verdict.

"You're on, Garry. We'll find our mysterious, cipher writing hermit if it takes all summer!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEARCH FOR THE HERMIT.

THE chums shook hands on their resolve not to let the summer pass without finding their note writing friend, and then tumbled into the new bunks. The new cabin was almost as comfortable as the old, though not quite so complete.

Morning found them up bright and early, and breakfast was cooked in the new fire place. Garry complimented his chums on the work they had done the day before, and announced that since the duty roster had been so disrupted in the past few days, that they had better draw lots again for the "tin can," and thus start a new duty list. This proved agreeable to the others, and they decided it was the fairest thing to do since all three wanted to start out immediately in search of the hermit.

Phil drew the short stick, and thus was set for that day in the lookout, Dick was the next one to draw, and as his stick was shorter than Garry's, it meant that he would relieve Phil, while Garry would take the third vigil on the mountaintop.

"Now, there's one thing more to be done," said Garry as they cleared away the breakfast. "We have talked a lot about going after the hermit but have no idea as to how to proceed. Evidently there is a key to the old fellow's location in his note. It is written in much the same vein as the one that told us where to find Jean LeBlanc that time he kidnapped little Patty Graham. He is fond of putting things in a cryptic way, and so we must pick the letter to pieces and find out what meaning he is trying to convey to us."

Garry got out the deciphered letter and they read it over again.

"He starts out with 'Do you not wonder that you never see me,' " said Garry. "That's a straight statement. We do wonder and we have wondered. So there is evidently nothing cryptic in that sentence. Now the next one, 'Seek and ye shall find.' That is evidently to let us know that he would not be averse to our finding him, and is also a challenge to our ingenuity. Now here is where the puzzle begins. 'How do I always sign my notes?' Well, we know that he always draws that crude representation of what seems to be a lonely pine tree, near the base of which is evidently a boulder with a big X on it, probably carved. Now what do you fellows make of it? I have an idea, but I want to see if you arrive at the same idea, and then that will be pretty good proof that it is what he means to convey to us."

"I was thinking of the note just before I fell asleep last night, and I think it means that he lives somewhere near a spot where there is just such a tree and boulder. He probably carved that great X on the stone himself almost as one would put the number on the door of a house in the city," suggested Phil.

"Guess my idea is the same as Phil's" said Dick. "That is, I think his idea is probable, but I haven't thought of it much myself."

"Well, that checks up on what I think, so we'll

take that for granted for a while anyway. Now comes, 'Go straight as the compass says.' That doesn't need a half day to decide what it means. It is evidently a direction. However, there are any number of directions that one would determine with a compass. Question is which way to start."

"Here's my little contribution to this puzzle solving," said Dick. "There are four main directions on the compass, as we all know, north, east, south and west. I don't think he would have given us such a vague direction, as north by northeast, or anything of that sort. I vote that he means one of the four cardinal directions of the compass. I think my solution is borne out also by the next sentence, 'but which point you must find for yourself.' The four directions are generally known as the points of the compass, and I think he means that we are to start out and follow one of the points, which one we'll have to determine by elimination, trying each until we strike the right direction. What do you fellows say?"

Garry agreed that his argument was logical, and Phil coincided with him.

"At any rate," said Garry, "it's as good as any other suggestion, and even if he meant any one of the other numerous directions, we would have to start with some certain system, and there is no better one than taking the cardinal points to begin

with. The last question is, where do we start from if we go in one of the four directions. I guess he must mean this cabin, or else he would have dropped some hint as to what to consider a beginning place."

This all being agreed on, the boys settled on a method of search that would at the same time allow them to pursue their duties. They decided that the east would be eliminated first, because that was on the other side of the river, and far out of their territory. The south was the next point to go by the board, since the boys understood that there were a few trappers who lived in the woods there, as it was near the town and a hermit would avoid people. That left two directions, north and west.

"By process of elimination, we have discarded two directions," said Garry. "And of the two left, the north seems to be the most likely. To the west is the other guarded section, and you remember we asked the Ranger there one day if he had ever seen or heard of the stranger and he told us no. So the north seems the best bet. However, we cannot overlook the west, as the old fellow might be on that section. He could easily keep out of sight of the Ranger. Now who goes north and who to the west?"

"Suppose I draw lots again for you two fellows,"

suggested Phil. "I have no interest in the matter today, and can be the judge."

Dick and Garry immediately assented to the proposition, and Phil proceeded to select two twigs of unequal length, which he held, one in each hand, behind his back.

"Now the short one will be the west and the other the north. Walk up gentlemen and make your choice. Garry, you have first choice of hands."

Garry chose the left, leaving the right to Dick. Phil brought the twigs into view and it was found that Dick had drawn the coveted north.

Everything being settled, Garry and Dick prepared for an extended hike, deciding that it would be useless to make a one day search, since they would cover the same ground two or three times by doing that. They decided to set the limit at three days' absence. That would give the lookout man a chance to try the search in the event the others failed, and also would be a check on the safety of the boys.

They packed their knapsacks with plenty of food supplies, and saw to it that the rifles were freshly cleaned and plenty of ammunition provided, for their food, to a large extent, would be gotten with the rifles.

For the first time they packed the wireless carrying 'phones, those compact 'phones given them by

Mr. Graham. It was decided to carry the old wire 'phones also, in case there was anything wrong with their setting up of the apparatus.

"We can try them out on this trip," said Garry, and if they prove to be O.K., we can then dispense with the old 'phones, and depend entirely on the others in the future."

Then with all in readiness they bade good bye to Phil, and set out on their quest of the Hermit of the Lone Pine, Garry to the west and Dick to the north.

For the present we will follow Garry and see how he fared in quest of adventure. Garry made his way directly to the clearing where they had found the bee tree. He reached there about noon, and made his lunch at the place where the raspberries grew, since they would make an acceptable dessert. This done, he laid out his plan of campaign. By following his compass he judged that the clearing was about a mile out of the due west course, hence he must get back on the trail. As he sat with his back against a rock after his lunch, he thought of the most advisable course to pursue. Would he get to the trail and keep on going till he succeeded or failed, or better yet, would he strike out for the lookout cabin of that section. He decided on the latter course since he knew nothing of the country

that lay beyond, and he could get information from the men who had charge there.

He found the blazed trail they had made when they encountered the movie people and followed that. It was a glorious summer's day, not too hot, for the great pines shaded and kept cool the ground beneath. Long shafts of sunlight flickered at intervals through the branches of the trees, weaving fantastic patterns on the ground beneath. Altogether it was one of the most perfect days Garry had experienced that summer.

After a steady tramp he reached the place where the movie people had been encountered and the picture spoiled when they thought they were rushing to the defense of an attacked person. Here Garry took stock of his position again, and struck out in the general direction of where he supposed the lookout hill to be. He had consulted his compass again, and by roughly figuring his position, decided that he was almost back on the due west course from his own shack. He followed along for a short time, and glanced frequently at the trees as he passed. He was not expecting to find any trail marks, but the habit of the woods had grown on him strongly, even in the short time that he and his chums had been away from civilization. The woodsman's eyes are trained to see everything, in-

deed, keen powers of observance is an essential in a Ranger.

Suddenly he halted and scanned a tree closely. There was a blaze mark on it, but it was unusual. Ordinarily when one blazes a trail they hack a small, indiscriminate gash in the tree, but this blaze mark was a carefully cut letter X.

"Now I wonder if that means anything," thought Garry to himself. "The old hermit's boulder always has an X on it, and in his cipher note he called particular attention to the way he signed always."

He cast about in a narrow circle examining other trees, and finally found another blaze mark in the same design. A third one was soon found, and having established his line, consulted his compass and found that the new trail, if trail it was, led to the northeast. Garry pondered for some minutes before he started out, then decided that this was evidently a signal from the old hermit. He remembered that the note said, "go straight as the compass says," but it made no reference as to how far the straight trail should be followed. Evidently this was to be followed until some sign could be found, and this blaze mark evidently was made by the hermit and meant to be followed.

"At any rate," thought Garry, "I may as well take a chance, since the whole search is nothing

but a chance, and one thing is as apt to lead me to a successful finish as another."

Following the peculiar blaze marks he made swift time. He hastened in order that he might get as far as possible before dark overtook him. As he hurried, his thoughts were busy with the quest that he had come on so that he was not paying particular attention to the ground, and his foot caught on a projecting root.

He fell heavily to the ground, instinctively protecting his knapsack as he fell, since it contained the precious wireless carrying 'phone, and the light, collapsible aluminum standard for the antennae.

He sat up after a dazed moment and felt of his ankle to see if he injured it in any way. He found that fortunately he had escaped without even a sprain, though when he fell he had felt a sharp twinge of pain that made him fear for the moment that he had twisted it, which would have been a misfortune since he was so far from home, and out of the usual beaten path that they followed on the patrols.

Getting a fresh start, he walked for some time, keeping his eye on the blaze marks, which grew farther and farther apart as he covered more distance. At last they stopped altogether and so keeping two trees constantly in line all the time, he proceeded. Just before dark, he decided to recon-

noitre a bit and see where he was as near as he could make out.

He felt in his pocket for his compass and found to his dismay that it was not there. He distinctly remembered having placed it there, but to make sure went through all his pockets, but the missing instrument was not to be found. Evidently it had jarred out of his pocket the time he fell.

Making the most of the few remaining minutes of light, he climbed a tree, but could see nothing in the way of a landmark. Then the realization came home to him.

Garry was lost in the Big Timber!

CHAPTER XVI.

LOST.

GARRY took stock of the situation. For once in his life he was at a loss what to do. The realization that he was all alone in the great forest with absolutely no idea where he was, for the moment upset him, and made him think with less speed than was his custom.

Then he wisely decided that the best thing to do was to wait until morning. He knew that when

one is lost in the woods, the natural inclination is to walk in a circle, getting into a worse tangle as long as one walks without any particular objective in view.

The woods were quite dense at this place. It was pure virgin forest that had evidently never known the saw and axe of the lumber men.

Garry noticed that the darkness was gathering rapidly so it behooved him to move quickly. His first act was to take advantage of the scant light to find a spot for his fire, one that would be sheltered from the wind in case a heavy breeze should blow up during the night. Then he hastily gathered a small quantity of firewood, picking up some gale-tossed branches. In a short time he had a rousing fire.

He had used but little water from his canteen, but he knew that he would have to go easy on the use of it, for although there was every probability that he would come across a spring or a brook of some sort during the coming day, it would not do to take chances.

Using a small quantity he made coffee, and with a little mixed some biscuits in the mouth of his flour bag, and set these on the coals. These were done in a few minutes, and then he fried bacon, and made his supper of these simple foods.

Immediately after supper he further prepared for

the night by gathering some balsam boughs. It was easy to find a tree even in the dark, which had fallen in all its intensity as he cooked and ate his meal, for the balsam has a pungent fragrance that may be smelled above any of the other evergreens.

He spread these boughs on the ground near the campfire, for he noticed that it was growing chilly. Over this he spread his blanket, and then gathering a stock of firewood, laid down beside the glowing coals of the campfire.

Garry was now considerably calmer and knew that when morning came he could lay a course by the sun and soon find his way back to some landmark that would guide him back to his own section, or at least to that patrolled by his neighbors.

As he lay on his back, he peered through the trees trying to get a look at the stars to see if he could find the dipper or the North star, and determine approximately in what direction he was. But the denseness of the trees cut out the feeble light of the planets, millions of miles away.

At last, after piling on some heavy green sticks that would burn for a long time, he fell asleep. Once, about two o'clock he woke up, and finding the fire almost dead put additional wood on, and then sank back into slumber.

He awoke at dawn, prepared to set a course by the sun as soon as it came up. Coffee, bacon and

biscuits again formed his meal, and then on consulting his watch found that the sun should have been up several minutes.

Immediately he climbed a good sized tree, using the wire hoop system, and found to his dismay that it was a grey, cloudy day that gave every appearance of becoming a drizzly, rainy day before long.

Here was a mean situation. His compass gone, with no idea where he was, and no sun to help him locate himself. He descended the tree, almost at a loss as to what step to take next.

Garry attempted to reckon the distance that he had walked after he had found the new trail, but found it was impossible. He had walked much faster than usual in order to cover as much ground as possible. To the best of his belief, he had come at least twenty miles.

The last three or four miles he had covered without the trail marks to guide him, and he wondered whether he too had fallen into the common mistake of walking in a circle, despite the fact that he was an experienced enough woodsman to know better. He thought that he might regain the trail by making wide circles and examining the trees. However, he realized that this would be an interminable task, ranging in wide circles over an area of three or four, or possibly five miles. Then too, he had no

idea in which direction to strike out to find where the blaze marks ended.

Garry seemed to be up a stump. Then he be-thought himself of the wireless. Perhaps he could have either Dick or Phil search for the X blazed trail and follow it as far as possible, then blaze a new trail beyond that, firing a rifle at intervals until they came to him.

He unshipped the collapsible antennae pole, and fitting it together, erected it. Then he got out the transmitter and tested the batteries. He began calling for Phil, and after each few minutes of silence adjusted his tuning apparatus.

But only a dead silence rewarded his efforts. At last after an hour he gave it up as a bad job. There was something wrong either with his carrying 'phone, or with his installation of the big receiving set at the lookout cabin, although Andrews had made it work. It might have become disarranged.

In his mind he went over each detail of the assembling of the apparatus, but could not remember any place where he had failed to follow instructions or use his knowledge of radio telegraphy.

Here was something else to worry about. Suppose that the apparatus was O.K. in every respect. There was then the possibility that some harm had befallen Phil. Maybe LeBlanc or Anderson had come on him unawares and made him a prisoner or

done something worse. Of course, Sandy was with him, and Garry knew that the big Airedale would fight for any one of the three boys to the last breath, but the wily LeBlanc had once before effectively dealt with the dog, and might perhaps have done it again.

Garry braced himself. He knew that he could not starve in the woods as long as he had his rifle and cartridges and a few matches. Somewhere he knew he would find water, and meat; water and fire would be all that he needed. He took stock of his matches, and found to his dismay that he had only three left.

Your true woodsman, however, is never daunted by such a thing as a lack of matches. Garry knew that when the sun was out he could easily start a fire by unscrewing the crystal from his watch and using it as a burning glass.

However, the gloomy day seemed to promise rain, so he knew that he would have to safeguard his matches. He decided that when it came time to prepare his noon luncheon, he would use the old Indian method of lighting a fire by using two dry sticks. No sooner did he decide on this than he set about getting a number of such sticks, and storing them carefully in an inside pocket in the event that he would need them more than once.

Garry now set himself seriously to figure out his

probable whereabouts. He remembered that the blazed trail had led northwest from the point where he started to follow it. He believed that he had continued in approximately the same direction after the blaze had disappeared.

Therefore to get back to the starting point he would have to pursue a course just the reverse, to the southeast. All that then remained was to wait until the sun should appear, or the stars come out at night so he could determine the points of the compass.

Just to occupy himself, he circled about among the trees, seeking some sort of a trail or blazed marks. He always returned to the original starting point, for he did not want to get any more bewildered than he already was. This took some time, and soon he judged it to be near noon. At any rate he decided he was hungry, so he went in search of a squirrel. He was not long in finding one of the chattering little chaps, and a well aimed bullet brought down his luncheon.

The next task was to start the fire by means of the dry sticks. First it was necessary to find some sort of a tindery substance. This was easily found in an old weather-beaten stump, near which lay a big pine that had been smashed in some great wind-storm. He gathered more than he would need for one fire, and stored it in his knapsack for future use.

Making a fire with sticks is not as simple a matter as it sounds, for it requires some patience.

The proper method is to take one of the dry sticks and with the point of a knife bore a small hole part-way into the stick. This is laid in a secure place on the ground, anchored down, and around the hole and stick is laid some of the tinder which has been rubbed into a fine powder.

The other stick is then pointed at one end, just as one sharpens a pencil, and the point thus made is inserted into the hole in the first stick. After that the process consists merely of rotating the pointed stick briskly between the palms until the necessary friction creates a tiny spark.

Patient work soon results in setting the tinder afire, and this is blown into a live flame. Immediately this has been done, shreds and fragments of dry wood are placed on it and there you have your fire. Garry had built many a fire in this way, and so he succeeded in making his fire in about ten minutes.

The squirrel was soon skinned, and after the coffee was boiled, was toasted in the usual fashion on the end of a pointed stick.

Garry was half way through his dinner, when suddenly he stopped, and cried aloud:

“For a supposed woodsman and Ranger, I certainly take the cake. Here I am with nature’s com-

passes all about me, and not brains enough to remember them."

And this was a fact. Garry, in the stress and excitement of being lost, had forgotten that there is one infallible rule that holds good in the woods, the compass that tells the traveler the direction, be it night or day, fair weather or stormy, winter or summer.

The rule is this.

The bark on a tree is always thickest and roughest on the north side of the tree. It is more noticeable in the winter than in the summer, but after a little practice, anyone can tell surely and quickly which is north.

This peculiar thing is one of the mysteries of Dame Nature.

The strongest winds invariably blow from the north, and this is the protection that wise Mother Nature has given to the trees.

Without waiting to finish his dinner, Garry jumped to his feet and proceeded to note the bark on three or four trees. Having found which was north, he figured out the direction he had come in, and found that he had evidently not followed a course to the northwest, but had got switched after he left the trail and gone almost straight west.

He hastily finished his dinner, and after trying vainly for several minutes to raise Phil via the

wireless, packed up the instruments, and plotted his course to follow. He picked four trees that made, as nearly as possible, the corners of a square. Standing at the tree which would be the northwest corner of the imaginary square, he sighted diagonally across to the other corner tree. This gave him approximately a southeast course. He could follow this by constantly keeping two trees ahead of him in line as one does in steering a rowboat. He could verify every few minutes by noting bark as he passed the trees.

After almost six hours of steady tramping, during which time he constantly verified his progress, stopping occasionally to plot out a course with four trees, he estimated that he had covered almost eighteen miles. He arrived at this conclusion after pacing off a mile, and noting the time that it took him to cover the distance.

At the end of this steady hike, he stopped for a breathing spell, and was preparing to climb a tree in search of landmarks when he heard a sound of a voice in the distance. After a minute's listening he glanced at the rifle to see if it was loaded, for he heard the approaching person singing in the French language.

And Jeane Blanc spoke French!

CHAPTER XVII.

DICK MEETS SUCCESS.

LET us leave Garry for the moment and find out how Dick fared in his search for the lone hermit. It will be remembered that Dick drew the north for his quest, and before starting out, he laid all his plans.

In the first place, it was hardly probable that the hermit was on the Boone land. The boys had covered the section pretty thoroughly since they had come to the forest as Rangers, so it was highly likely that he was somewhere in the great tract that lay to the north of their patrol section.

Dick was certain that he had drawn the lucky stick, for to his mind the north was where the hermit would be found. He remembered the time when little Patty Graham had been kidnapped by LeBlanc, and the hermit had given them the clue of the twin pines that had eventually led to the finding of the child. It was probable that the hermit was thoroughly familiar with that section, and more than likely that somewhere there was his home.

His first act was to go up to the lookout cabin and consult the map. He knew that it was about six miles to the river's edge from the shack, and he wanted to see how the river ran.

"Hello, thought you were gone after the elusive hermit by this time," Phil greeted him as he came to the "tin-can."

"Nothing like knowing where you are going," laughed Dick. "I have made up my mind to find the old chap, and I want to see what kind of land lies to the north."

"Well, old stocking, help yourself. There's the map, and you can figure all you want to," answered Phil.

A long consultation over the map showed that the river ran almost directly north for nearly twenty miles, then swung in to the west. That is the course of the river, the current of course coming down.

The wide brook where stood the twin trees was plainly shown on the map, and with a pocket rule Dick figured that when he came to the brook, if he struck in directly west for five miles, he would be in approximately a straight line with the cabin. This was exactly what he wanted, for by paddling up the river to this point he could save a great deal of time and a lot of walking. The canoe could be cached in the same spot as it was when they made

their never-to-be-forgotten search for the half breed and little Patty.

Dick looked carefully over the map for any possible clue to what might be a possible home for the hermit. Of course he did not expect to find the location of the cabin, or anything of that sort, but he could get an idea of the sort of country it was, and if there was any sizable clearing with a water supply. He found that there were several such places, but no one of them seemed to be in a direct north line.

His chief desire was accomplished, however, and that was in knowing just how far in he must go to get back on a line with the shack.

He explained all this to Phil, who listened with great interest. Phil was very envious of both Garry and Dick, for he wanted to be in on the search, but like a good Ranger he knew his duty was at the "tin can," since he had had just as good a chance to go on the search as the others, only luck favored them, and Phil was a thorough sportsman, willing to abide without a murmur as the lots that were drawn said he should.

Having gotten all possible information from the map, Dick prepared to leave.

"Keep an eye out for our bear," called Phil, as he left. "I untied him before I came up here."

Dick laughingly promised to do this, and has-

tened down the mountain side. He packed his knapsack carefully, putting in a good food supply, yet using stuff that would not weigh too much. Of course the wireless was put in. He packed extra cartridges in his pocket, not knowing what kind of an adventure or trouble he might run into during his search.

All this done, he set out for the river bank. It was noon when he reached it, and he made his lunch on the river bank, then got out the canoe. He knew that he would have to make speedy time, for the canoe would have to be carried on the portage, since one man could not possibly paddle through the rapids unaided. Also, carrying a canoe alone was no small task, and would have to be done by easy stages. In order to make paddling easier, Dick ballasted the front of the canoe with three or four stones. This made a little extra weight of course, but it kept the nose of the light craft in the water, and made steering easier. This was a pet trick of Dick's, although the average canoist does not care to do it on account of the extra weight.

If he had been going merely in a race, he would not have done this, but in a race a few minutes of paddling only is necessary, while Dick had a long grind ahead of him.

He made excellent time to the portage, as a carrying place for a canoe is always known, and took a

short rest before attempting the long carry. He left his knapsack on, and tied the paddles firmly to the thwarts. Then turning the canoe over so that it rested bottom up, he lifted one end, and getting under it, lifting it so that he could get under the middle of it.

Dick had previously filled his hat with grass, so that it formed a soft cushion, for the greater weight would have to be on his head. The carry was a long job, as he had to take many frequent rests. First he tried to make a good deal of distance and then take a good rest, but he soon abandoned this in favor of short hauls and short rests. This proved to be the better scheme, and at last the long tiresome carry was completed.

He took a good rest, and then procuring new stones, weighted the bow and with long powerful strokes, began his journey up river. It was nearly three o'clock when he started, so he knew that he would have to camp somewhere along the river bank for the night. He decided to paddle until he got tired, halting a while for some supper and then continuing paddling in the moonlight, that is, provided there was any.

Dick paddled steadily till dusk, then seeing that there was evidently going to be no moon, nor even stars that night, pulled in while there was light enough to see by.

He made camp hastily, starting a fire and preparing his supper. After he had eaten, he gathered more firewood, for the night was chilly, and rolled in.

It was a lonesome night. The tree toads croaked noisily, and now and then could be heard the distant hoot of an owl, or the plaintive note of a whippoorwill. The boys had so seldom made single patrols, that they had not gotten used to spending the night alone in the woods. Dick's one hope was that it would not begin to rain during the night.

Finally he rolled in his blanket, after putting green wood on the fire, and in a short time was sound asleep. He awoke two or three times during the night and replenished the fire. The last time he woke, he found that the fire had gone out, but he started it again, feeling chilled and cold. He knew that this fire would last until morning, and there would be enough coals to get his breakfast with.

He dreamed two or three times during the night, and always the hermit seemed to be the central figure of his dream. When dawn came he woke, and was displeased to find that the day gave promise of being rainy and not fair as he had hoped the night before. Breakfast was a hasty affair, and again he embarked in the canoe and set out for the first objective of his journey, the twin pines that

stood like sentinels on either side of the brook that emerged into the river at that point.

Three hours' steady paddling brought him at last to this goal, and he hauled the canoe out of the water, and hid it in the brush, in the same place where it had been cached when they had sought LeBlanc. He looked in the place where the half-breed had hidden his canoe that time, but it was gone and the ground, on being examined, showed that it had not been there for some time.

Before getting under way, he cut a slender sapling, and digging out a line and hook from his knapsack, searched under a fallen log till he found several beetles. He baited his hook, and after a few minutes of angling caught a fine perch. Twice more he was successful, and then he cleaned them and wrapped them in some of the grass that grew at the river's edge.

This provided him with luncheon and dinner. They had not had any fish for some time, and the change would be a welcome one he thought.

He chose to walk on the south side of the brook, for he knew that some distance in it swung to the north, and by keeping on the lower side he would not have to cross it later. He kept the sun at his back, thus giving him a due westerly course.

As he walked he counted his paces. This is a sure way of determining the distance that one

walks. All that anyone needs to do to become fairly expert at this is to maintain an even pace. The average person will take a step thirty inches long. This is the best step. It has been found by long observation in the army that it is the best, because it fits the average person and one can walk easier than by using abnormally long or short steps.

A pace is two steps. By starting off with the right foot, it is a pace every time the left foot strikes the ground. Thus one pace would be sixty inches, or five feet, and to cover a mile, 1,056 paces are necessary. Dick had so often paced distances that he knew he could come within a very few feet of a mile.

Dick did not try to hurry, especially as he did not know how far he would have to walk, and a steady hike would allow him to cover more ground in the long run than would frequent spurts followed by a slower walk for a breathing spell.

He ticked off the paces as he went, stopping for a five minute rest at the end of each mile. At last the paces registered the fact that he was approximately five miles in from the river bank. According to the computations made from the map, he was now back in line with the cabin.

Here he halted and took a ten minute rest before trekking to the north. As he rested he thought of the old hermit, and began to wonder if he would

find him after all. His chief doubt was that the old hermit should know just in what line he was with the cabin, but then he reflected that he probably was skilled in the lore of the woods, and was able by rule of thumb methods to figure out that he was in a direct north and south line with the shack.

Dick wondered how far to the north his search would take him, and decided to walk only until nightfall. This would allow him to get home on the night of the following day, and this was necessary since they had agreed at the start to be gone only three days on the first leg of the search.

Dick had treked about two miles, when he found a clew. It was in the shape of a rabbit snare. This was concrete evidence that some one lived in the vicinity somewhere. He knew that it was useless to search for another snare with the idea of following the line until it led him to the home of the trapper, or a trail that led to near the home, for trappers generally set their snares and traps in a great circle.

Of course, following such a circle would eventually lead one within striking distance, but it would be a tiresome task crisscrossing back and forth in search of each succeeding snare.

Dick figured this all out, and then decided that the best course to pursue was to follow directions, and go along one route till he succeeded or failed.

At any rate, the finding of the snare was encouraging, and Dick started out with renewed confidence.

Although there was no especial need for doing so, he kept track of his paces, as it served to occupy his mind, and made the distance seem shorter.

He had covered a little more than eight miles, when he came to a little clearing, and there a sight met his eyes that made his heart leap with anticipation. Standing in the midst of the clearing was a lordly pine, monarch of all it surveyed, and at its base stood a boulder, in which a letter X had been rudely scratched and chipped. Such a boulder is unusual in the woods, this one being just a freak of nature evidently. Dick glanced all about for a sign of human habitation, but there was none. Then he examined the boulder closely and found there was a cairn in back of it. A cairn is nothing more than a heap of small stones. Sometimes it is made merely to indicate a trail mark, sometimes it is used to hide a message in. Dick immediately kicked the cairn down, and found what he hoped to discover, a note. It was brief, but it was written by the hermit, and said

“Success! Now walk three miles to the west.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HERMIT'S HOME.

"HURRAH," shouted Dick, exuberantly, almost doing a war dance in his excitement. He was on the road to a successful termination of his search, and soon the hermit would no longer be a mysterious stranger, whom they would know only through cryptic, strange notes left in a peculiar manner.

He was about to start at a brisk trot on the concluding stage of the journey, when for the first time a worrying thought came to him. Suppose that the whole thing was a gigantic hoax. Dick did not know what the territory was like in this section of the state, and did not know whether there was a Ranger here or not. For a moment he feared that it was just a practical joke on the part of a Ranger or a trapper.

Then another thought came, this time an alarming one. What if it was a decoy to bring him to this section away from help? What if the writer of the note was LeBlanc or Anderson. Or perhaps there really was a hermit, and LeBlanc knew of

him, and had written the note to draw him to that part of the great forests.

These alarming and disquieting thoughts flitted through Dick's mind, until he calmed down and thought the matter out coolly. In the first place there must be a hermit, or at least someone that took an interest in them, for had not they been warned several times against the halfbreed and been given a tip as to where he was when he captured the little Graham girl? Then he had tanned the bear skin for them.

Furthermore, the last note was in a puzzling cipher, and Dick was certain that neither the halfbreed or the ex-deputy Ranger Anderson had education enough to compose such a cryptogram.

Dick laughed at himself for his foolish ideas, and then hitching up his knapsack higher on his shoulders, and giving a glance at the chamber on his repeating rifle, just for safety's sake, set out for the end of the quest.

With the successful conclusion in sight, the three miles seemed but a trifle. It was past noon, so he set himself toward the sun and checked off the miles by pacing. At the end of what he figured was three miles, he paused and looked about.

Then his heart sank. There was no sign of hermit, shack or anything that might give him a hint as to what to do. It was a joke after all, he thought.

Well, it had at least been an exciting time. Now the only thing that remained to do was to set out for the home shack again, and talk over the strange affair with Garry and Phil.

Then, again. Perhaps one of them had been successful. The mysterious note writer had played so many seemingly strange pranks, that he might have led one of them on a merry will-of-the-wisp chase, and revealed himself to another. Dick had had a strenuous day, so he sat down with his back against a tree to take a short rest before the long trek on the way home.

Dick had been resting only a short time, when he was startled almost out of a year's growth, when a voice immediately behind him said:

"Well, my boy, it seems that you have found me."

He leaped to his feet, bringing up his rifle, cast a quick glance about, and then there stepped out from behind the tree under which he had been sitting, the Hermit.

The hermit was a tall, spare man, with short white whiskers and snowy white hair. With the exception of his hat, he was clad entirely in leather. He had a leathern coat and breeches and heavy moccasins. For a headpiece he had a battered, old, black felt hat, one that had evidently seen long service, for there were several rents in it.

Dick hardly knew what to say, but at last he managed to utter :

“Are you the man who has been writing those notes to us?”

“I am that person,” answered the hermit.

“Why were you so secretive, why didn't you just come and visit us on the many occasions that you were near us?”

“Simply because I did not choose that you should know me at that time. There are few people in these woods that know me. Then, too, I wanted to test your ability and that of your companions. Had you not been able to read my notes and understand what I meant by them, I would not have cared to know anything about you, and you would not have heard from me again. As it was, you all showed you had brains, therefore I decided that you should see me.”

Dick had been expecting to see a strange sort of a person, but he had expected a man of the woods, without any particularly wonderful talents, although the ciphers meant that the man could hardly be illiterate, but he by no means expected to hear such perfect language. The aged hermit had the hallmark of a gentleman on him, and inspired a very certain respect.

“Do you live in this vicinity?” was Dick's next question.

"All this great forest state is my home," responded the hermit, "and I have several places where I stay from time to time, but this vicinity might be called my home."

Dick had been peering about as they talked, searching for some sign of a shack or loghouse, but there was none. The hermit, being quick of wit, understood what Dick was up to, and with a little throaty chuckle, probably meant to be a laugh, said:

"You will not see my home here. No one ever sees my home unless I choose to show it to them, and there are not more than one or two that have ever been in it. You, however, will see it. And now, what is your name?"

Dick told him, and the old man mused over it for a moment, repeating it out loud two or three times.

"Dick Wallace. Dick Wallace. It seems so familiar to me, and yet I cannot remember in what connection I ever heard it. What are your companions called?"

"One, our leader, is called Garfield, or Garry for short, Boone. The other is Philip Durant," replied Dick.

"Boone, that also seems familiar, but I never heard the other one. It is a French name, of course.

"Yes, Phil is French," answered Dick.

"I hope that he is not a bad Frenchman as the halfbreed LeBlanc is, but then he couldn't be, for

"I have seen him, and he is a fine looking boy, as all of you are."

"Why," said Dick amazed, "have you seen us? Several times you have been around, but never to our knowledge have we seen you, so how could you know what we looked like?"

"I have seen you a number of times, and have watched you, but you did not see me for the very simple reason that I took excellent care that you should not. I have seen you while you were on your patrols, and I have watched you in the iron house on the top of the hill. I have a pair of excellent glasses, and I can climb a tree with ease, even though I appear old and worn out," replied the hermit.

Despite his spare look and furrowed face, Dick could see that his frame was tough and wiry, and that his health was better than that of many men not as old as he was. But then, he would have to be a strong man to stand the rigors of a life in the woods, far away from human habitation. Had he not been of stern stuff, he would have succumbed long ago.

"What is your name," finally asked Dick.

"I have none that I remember, you may just call me Hermit."

"What, you mean to say that you don't know

what your name is?" repeated Dick, staring at the old man in amazement.

"Oh, I probably had one some time ago, but as I have never used it I have forgotten it. Perhaps I never had a name."

His last remark convinced Dick that the old hermit was partially crazy. He did not voice this thought, of course, but contented himself with asking the old woodsman how long he had lived in the forests.

"Ever since I can remember," was the astonishing reply. "However, I suppose that you are anxious to see my home. Well, you shall. You must follow me a short ways and then you will see my largest home, my estate. I have other places in different parts of the woods, as I told you before. You would have to search long for this place before you would find it. Come, follow me."

He headed into the thick underbrush that grew over two or three fallen trees, and then Dick saw that they were on a fairly well defined trail. His sharp eyes noted the way as they walked. Again the hermit seemed to be divining his thoughts.

"I only use a trail for a little while, and then I approach my home in a different manner, thus allowing the trail to get old, and keep unwelcome people away."

They walked only a few minutes, when they

arrived at a hill, and the hermit, with long swinging strides, set off up the fairly steep incline. Dick followed him in silence, and then after a few minutes, the hermit paused and announced, "Here is my home."

Dick looked about, but there was never a sign of a cabin.

Again the hermit gave the throaty little chuckle, he did not seem to be able to laugh. "You could never find it," he said.

He led the way to a place that seemed to be nothing more than a pile of brush, but reaching into the mass of old boughs, he evidently found some sort of a latch string, for he gave a sharp pull, and the entire mass moved out. It was a piece of excellent camouflage, and would have defied the eyes of the most experienced woodsman.

Going into the aperture thus created, he called to Dick, and the boy, wondering, followed into a cave.

So this was where the hermit made his home. The way led down a natural narrow passage, and soon they emerged into a large cave. There was an opening at one end that admitted the light, and going to this, followed by Dick, he stepped out. Dick saw that they had stepped out into a chasm more than a score of feet deep.

Under a shelving cliff, there had been built two sides of a log hut, the naturally shaped cliff forming

the other two. Into this went the hermit, and Dick, following him, saw a fine comfortable one-room cabin. There were several skins on the floor, and two or three hanging on the wooden walls of the cabin.

There was a stone fireplace at one end, in front of which was a table and chair made of hand-hewn logs. There was also a surprising feature in the shape of a book case, or rather a single shelf containing about a dozen books. While the hermit put fresh wood on the fire, and unshipped a coffee pot from a crude cupboard, Dick edged nearer and looked at the books. It was a surprising collection. There was a worn Bible, three or four books with Latin names, which Dick was able to read from his high school knowledge of the tongue, one being a Virgil, and the other two volumes were Caesar's wars. Added to this were a couple of books on philosophy, some on botany, and one book of mathematics. It was the collection, limited of course, of a scholar, and increased the amazement of Dick. In fact, everything about the old man was amazing.

There was a bunk built against one side, and instead of blankets, there were soft skins, evidently trophies of the hermit's rifle that stood in one corner. It was an old rifle, but perfectly serviceable, and appeared to be well kept. The last feature of the cabin was a long benchlike affair made of

logs, one side of which had been hewn smooth with an axe, and on this were stacked several bunches of herbs of various kinds.

Noting Dick's gaze, the hermit informed him that those herbs kept him supplied with what few food supplies were necessary for him to get at long intervals. Answering Dick's inquiry, he told him that he never went to Millinocket, but went to a town some distance to the southwest. Here he sold his herbs and skins of the animals caught in his traps, and then with the money thus procured, journeyed to a far distant lumber camp and bought his supplies there.

There was a stew simmering in an iron kettle on a hook in the fireplace, and bringing two battered tin plates from the cupboard he dipped out some of the stew and bade Dick eat. Dick had the ever ready appetite of a fat boy, and fell to with a hearty will.

As they ate the meal, the hermit kept silence, and Dick followed suit. Finally the hermit said without any preface:

"I know where Jeane LeBlanc is!"

CHAPTER XIX.

PHIL IS CAPTURED

LEFT alone in the "tin can" after Dick had departed, when he had finished consulting his map, Phil prepared himself for two or three days' tour of duty as a lookout. He was keenly disappointed at not having been able to be one of the searchers, but duty came before pleasure in the woods, where the relaxation of vigilance for even a couple of hours might cost the timber owners thousands and thousands of dollars.

The fact that the day was getting cloudy gave him some faint hope, for if a rainstorm came he could leave the "tin can" and join in the hunt. Rain in the forests of course frees patrolmen and lookouts from duty as long as the rain lasts, and for a day or so after, while the ground and trees are still wet.

Somewhat to help pass the time, and partly to see if there was any chance of rain, he called Millinocket to ask Nate what the weather bureau report for the day was.

Nate's office answered the ring, but Nate was not

there, and the office had been left in charge of a clerk. The clerk blasted Phil's hopes by telling him that the report from the bureau at Portland for the northern part of Maine was cloudy that day, but changing and variable winds would probably keep the rain off, and give fair weather for the next day.

This over, Phil resigned himself to his fate and prepared for his vigil. He swept the countryside carefully through his glasses, for the visibility was poor, and in the grayness, smoke would be hard to see at some distance. On a bright clear day, of course, a smoke screen could be spotted for miles.

Having completed this for the moment, he got out his knife, and finding some dry pine sticks that he saved for the purpose, he began to whittle. Phil was clever with a knife, and could carve intricate baubles, such as chains, or balls imprisoned in a rack. He often made these for the youngsters in his home village, and today he did it merely to help pass away the long, lonely hours. Every few minutes he stopped work and looked over the countryside.

Once his heart leaped when a few big drops of rain fell, and then disappointment came when the wind veered and the rain ceased.

Occasionally he opened the key of the wireless and listened for a possible message from one of the boys. None came, however, and fearful that he

might miss a chance sound, sat with the headpiece on and the key open.

Sandy slept most of the time, occasionally waking and putting his nose against Phil's knee, begged for a pat on the head. Noon came, and Phil prepared lunch; rather he ate the cold lunch that he had brought with him, and fed the remains to Sandy. Giving a glance over the section, he climbed down out of the tower with Sandy and romped with the big Airedale for several minutes.

After the romp he climbed back into the lookout, and was in the act of giving a careful look-see at the section, when the wire telephone rang sharply. Coming on the still air, it startled him for a moment, but only a scant moment, and he answered it. He thought as he answered it that it would be from Millinocket, for Dick or Phil would have used the wireless since it was now installed.

"Hello," he called.

A faint voice answered him, saying:

"This is Garry. I've hurt myself. Come to help me."

"Where are you?" he called anxiously.

"About half way down the west phone line. I've broken an arm and leg. I fell out of a tree."

"All right, I'll help you soon. Why didn't you use the wireless?"

There was a minute's silence, and then a faint reply came:

"It wouldn't work." Then there was a groan, a final word, "Come," and then silence. Phil called repeatedly but got no answer. He was in a quandary as what to do. Duty meant that he should stay on the lookout for the ever present menace of the devouring flames, but duty also called him to go to the aid of his stricken chum.

There was but one thing to do, and that was to go to Garry's aid. Delay in waiting for Dick to come home, or for rain to fall, might mean the death of his companion.

However, he must notify Nate Webster. He rang the 'phone, and hoped that fortune would favor him and that he would get Nate himself, rather than the Ranger office clerk.

Phil was overjoyed when Nate's shrill voice answered his ring. In a few words he told of the accident that had befallen Garry and that he must go to help him. Nate immediately told him to go.

"Take a good look and tell me if everything is all right," he directed Phil. This Phil did, and reported that everything seemed right side up.

"All right," answered Nate. "I'll 'phone the Ranger on the next section to keep a doubly sharp lookout. He can see something of your section from his lookout, and he has a good pair of fine lens

field glasses. I'll send a doctor on the way, in fact I'll come with him, and we will have him fixed up in no time. You will have to make a travois to bring him in on. Can you make a temporary splint for the arm and leg, so as to save him being jolted?"

Phil answered that he could. This is something that every Ranger must know something of. All woodsmen can make temporary splints, and some are even expert bonesetters, especially those that have been about lumber camps a great deal, where broken bones are a frequent occurrence.

Before he left the lookout, he threw the switch so that a call made from one of the 'phone lines throughout the woods would go direct to Millinocket to Nate's office, instead of being received at the lookout cabin and then relayed on to town.

He rushed down the mountainside, followed by Sandy, and packed his knapsack. He put in the wireless 'phone, and largely by instinct, packed the usual patrol rations of food. Then he procured several flat pieces of board that were lying in a corner of the cabin, and which he had intended to use for whittling, and put them in the pack to be used as splints. He made sure that he had bandages and first aid material, and then whistling to Sandy to come into the cabin, he left him on guard. He put

out food for Sandy, and then threw an old pair of gloves on the floor, bade the dog "watch them."

Once given that command, he knew that nothing would cause Sandy to stir from the spot except to eat a bite and get a drink.

He struck out on the usual trail to the west, intending to reach the 'phone line at its lower end and follow it up until he came to where Garry was waiting him.

A hard, steady hike brought him at last to the line. Here he halted a minute and attacked, or "hooked up" his old carrying 'phone and listened for a few minutes, for he thought there was a bare chance that Garry might try to reach the lookout again, in which case he could hear on the 'phone with which he "cut in" on the line.

There was no answer, so he packed up the box and tucked it back in the knapsack. Then he put off at a brisk dog trot up along the trail of the 'phone line. Phil knew approximately where the midway point of the line was, as he knew Garry did also, and when he reached that point, he was a little surprised to find no sign of his chum. Thinking that perhaps Garry, in his unsteadiness following the accident might have missed out on the location, and been hurt at a point farther up, he continued along the trail. As he went on hundred yards after hundred yards, his alarm increased.

Could Garry have tried to crawl along towards home? This would seem to be impossible, for with two broken limbs, the task would be too great. Then again, he had told Garry that he would come, and there would be no use in the injured boy's attempting to return home alone.

At last he reached a spot more than three quarters the distance up from the end of the line. And yet, there was never a sign of Garry.

He stopped and took stock of the situation. For the first time he thought of the possibility of a trick. Come to think of it, it didn't sound like Garry's voice over the 'phone, but he had unhesitatingly put it down to the fact of Garry's being weak from his injuries. He decided to follow the line to the end, and then double back for home as fast as his legs would carry him.

Phil wished now that he had brought Sandy with him, for he could have put him on the scent, and if he was anywhere in that neighborhood, the keen-nosed Airedale would find Garry.

He walked barely a hundred yards, when he heard a sharp command: "Drop that rifle and throw up your hands!"

Phil spun around, then his heart sank, for in front of him, covering him with rifles, stood Jean LeBlanc and the treacherous Anderson.

Much as he hated to surrender, Phil knew there

was nothing else to do, as it would be foolhardy to attempt to give battle with the odds all on the side of the enemy. He dropped his rifle to the ground and then slowly raised his hands.

"Guess we've got you now, young fellow," gloated Anderson, with a leering chuckle. "Tie his hands up, Jean, and tie them good and tight."

"Just a minute," begged Phil. "My chum is somewhere here with a broken arm and leg. Cannot you let me go along the rest of the line, even as your prisoner, so that I can help him?"

"Haw haw," laughed Anderson. "Guess we didn't put that over neat. Your chum isn't hurt nor is he going to be unless we catch him. You were fooled pretty nice by that telephone call. Had a hard time trying to talk like a boy whose voice I only heard once or twice, but it worked right out to a dot."

While Anderson had been talking, Jean was busily engaged in tying Phil's hands. He did a good job of it, as Phil found out when he tried to work his hands free. They left the pack on him, and then with a prod of a gun barrel, started out on a march to the northwest.

Phil tried to question his captors as to the meaning of the abduction, but could get no answer from either the halfbreed or Anderson. The only hint was Anderson's remark that when they got to their

destination he would know soon enough. After a walk of about four miles, they came to the halting place, and then Phil's pack was taken off and thrown to one side, while from his pack, LeBlanc took a heavy chain, such as is used in laying a bear trap, together with two big padlocks. Putting one end around Phil's ankle, he padlocked it tightly. The other end circled a tree, and was also padlocked.

"Now, you want to know what this is all about," jeered Anderson, "we'll tell you, since you have only a hundred to one chance of getting out of these woods before next Christmas, and then you won't know anything about it. We are going to pay back a few old scores, Jean and I, and the first thing is we are going to start one nice fire about twenty-five miles above the Boone section. We just wanted you away, so that fake telephone message was sent. You see, having once been in the Rangers, I have a good carrying 'phone.

"We're going to leave you soon to meditate on it, and after we start a rip roaring old forest fire, we're hiking out for Canada, then no one will know anything about all this, and the deputy at Millinocket won't know there's a fire till it's too late. All right, let's go, Jean."

"Wait," grunted LeBlanc. He looked in the knapsack, and there found a few patrol rations. "Now," said the halfbreed, as he finished looking at

it, "we'll have a little fun at your expense," and he put the knapsack just out of Phil's reach, even though he stretched out as far as the chain would allow him to.

"There's a little taste of Indian torture for you, laddie-buck," said Anderson. "When you get good and hungry, reach out for food, and you won't get any. Now we're off to settle up old scores against the Boone tribe."

Phil was a prisoner in the great woods!

CHAPTER XX.

TO THE RESCUE.

WE left Garry waiting the approach of the unknown person who was singing in French, giving him the natural thought that it was the half French, half Indian guide that was approaching.

Great was his relief when the newcomer came in sight and Garry discovered that it was the Ranger of the section adjoining the one guarded by him and his two chums, Dick and Phil.

"Greetings," cried the Ranger, "Finally came over to pay us a little visit? Been wondering when you would find the time."

"No, I've been scouting on the land to the north," replied Garry.

"What have you been doing up there, kind of far from your beat, isn't it?" queried the other.

"Yes, it is. I've been on the trail of a mysterious individual, who, for want of a better name, I and my chums call the Hermit.

"Say, you fellows have no end of things happen to you. Here I've been here for some time, and a small fire is all the excitement that has ever come my way. Is it that you chaps just naturally fall into things, or is there some charm about your section? Blest if I don't apply for it myself next summer. What is the latest, this business about a hermit?" he concluded with a questioning tone.

"Why, it's quite a long story, and I am some hungry," replied Garry. "Then I ought to be getting home."

"You won't get home tonight unless you've got eyes like a cat and don't feel tired. Your present position is almost on the extreme western edge of my section, and it is some little hike to your place. You had better come over to the cabin, which is about three miles from here, have supper with Clark and myself,—Clark is the lookout you know,—and tell us about your hermit chap."

After a minute's reflection, this seemed to Garry to be the most advisable course to pursue. He was

dog tired after his long and strenuous day, and the thought of a hot supper and a comfortable bed near a good fireplace was particularly pleasing.

"Let's go," he said.

On the way he told Forbes, that being the other's name, of the momentary scare he had when he heard the song in French.

"Oh, I often warble to myself when I am on the patrol, sort of helps to pass the time away, and as I have studied French for some time, especially last year in college, I often break out in song in that language, at least in what I call French, though a real native would probably laugh at me. Good joke on you, though, thinking it was your inimical guide. What would you have done if it had been him?"

"Captured him, and taken him back to jail in Millinocket," said Garry grimly.

Forbes looked at him curiously for a moment. He himself was a strapping big fellow of twenty-two or three, a football player, and one able to hold his own against most anyone, and he seemed a bit surprised at a boy's saying that he could cope with the wily LeBlanc.

Finally he exclaimed:

"By George, you know I believe you would! You and your partners are three plucky chaps, ready to stand against any of them. Still you have to be

that kind to hold down such a job as this, particularly with what you have been up against happening to you."

"We just do what we have to do as far as we are able, and let it go at that," replied Garry.

Soon they arrived at the comfortable cabin, where Forbes set about the supper.

"Haven't got much tonight except beans and bacon and coffee, and a few soda biscuits," said the Ranger. This, however, was a feast to a woodsman, particularly on a chilly day such as that had been, unusually chilly for the summer.

"Don't apologize," laughed Garry. "That is all anyone would want, only are you sure you have enough for an extra man?"

"Don't worry, Clark and I are both big eaters, and always have an extra ration or two in the old kit bag. Clark ought to be here in a minute or two now. It's after dark now."

While the supper was being prepared, Garry looked about the cabin. It was a substantially built one, that had evidently been used for the Rangers for some time. It had been brightened up a bit by hanging a couple of Indian blankets. Over the fireplace was an unusual thing. It was a pair of snowshoes, while in one corner was a pair of skees.

"What in the world do you do with winter stuff in this summer weather?" he inquired.

"Do look funny in July, don't they," laughed Forbes. "The answer is simple though. Clark and I are roommates at college, and we generally manage to get up here at least twice during the winter for a bit of winter camp life. We generally make it in Christmas and perhaps a week in March. We get the permission of the landowner, and as we have guarded this section some time, he is glad to let us use it. We get a bit of hunting, rabbits, and some snowshoeing and skeeing. It's a great stunt, you want to try it next winter. Clark and I are coming here next Christmas for a new stunt. We are going to bring our cameras and get some good pictures of deer or moose if we can."

"That is a fine idea, and I am going to spring it on the boys as soon as we get together again," replied Garry enthusiastically.

Just as supper was ready the lookout, Clark, came in. He was about the same age as Forbes, and he too, was a big chap. Garry was introduced, and then without further ceremony they sat down and made short work of the succulent beans and crisp bacon. The meal over and the dishes washed, Garry was immediately pressed to tell the story of the hermit. This he did, and as he had a knack of relating a story well, he had a most interested audience.

"That sure is some yarn," exclaimed Forbes.

"Clarkie, you and I are dead slow. We never run into anything like excitement. However," turning back to Garry, "you can bet that he is not on this section. I know every foot of the ground here, ought to, for this is my third summer, and there is no cave, cabin or shack, or even a hollow tree where a chap could make a home. That section that you were in, I don't know much about. All of that land, including the territory above your patrol, straight to the river's edge, is unprotected. Belongs to some New York chap who is either too stingy or too indifferent to the danger to have it patrolled. You know the State pays only half, and unless the owner comes through with the other half, there is no lookout. It is a shame because a fire starting there would sweep down through here in fine shape. I understand that it is soon to be a law that there be a Ranger on all forest land, because the legislature is to be asked to pass it by other timber holders who want complete protection. Of course on the government owned land there is ample protection. Clark here keeps a keen eye on it as far as he can see, and occasionally when I am on the upper end of my patrol I take a bit of a trip up there. Too bad you didn't find a trace of him, however."

"Maybe one of my pals had better luck," answered Garry. "Here's hoping so at any rate, for the old chap is an intriguing character and we

would like to know more about him." Garry was of course unaware of the fact that Dick had won the honor of finding the elusive note writer.

"Let's have a little harmony," suggested Clark, and to the surprise and enjoyment of Garry, they dug out a mandolin and guitar. They sang several of their college and fraternity songs, and then some old favorites in which Garry joined.

"Bring your chums over next rainy spell and we'll have a regular houseparty," suggested Clark, as the pair put their instruments away and got ready to roll into bed.

Garry at once accepted for his chums, little knowing that circumstances were going to take them far away by the time the next long rain set in.

Garry slept like a log, and did not awake without being vigorously shaken by Forbes. After breakfast, he bade goodbye to the hospitable Rangers and set out for home, letting no grass grow under his feet, for he was anxious for news of Dick's search, and also he wanted to see why the wireless did not work, thinking that it must be in the receiving set. It was possible that he had set up some part wrongly, and that would account for the failure to get a response to his message. Just to be sure, he set up his apparatus and tried for a message, but as usual was unrewarded.

He reached the cabin about midmorning, and

found Sandy still on watch. The big Airedale jumped on him with a wild exuberant greeting, then ran to the cupboard and sat there looking alternately at it and Garry.

"Why old topper, you must be hungry. Did Phil forget to feed you this morning?"

Sandy wagged his tail expectantly, and soon Garry had something to eat fixed for him. The dog ate so hungrily that Garry was surprised.

"Something wrong somewhere, never knew Phil to forget Sandy," muttered Garry apprehensively.

Feeling that all was not as it should be, he whistled to the dog to follow him and made for the "tin can." He found what he half expected to find, the lookout shack deserted. He looked about for some clue to Phil's absence, but found nothing at first. Then his keen powers of observation made him note that the connecting switch was thrown on the telephone. This was unusual, and meant only one thing, that Phil for some big reason, it would have to be big to make him desert his post, had gone into the woods, and fixed things so that he could telephone directly into Nate's office. This gave Garry an idea, and he threw off the connection and rang for the Deputy Ranger. After the connection was made, he got the clerk, who on hearing his name, was so astonished as to be almost speechless.

Finally he said:

"If you're Garry, then Nate and a doctor have gone to set your leg and arm that you broke!"

"That I broke!" echoed Garry in amazement. "Why both my arms and legs are as sound as bells. You'd think so if you did the walking that I did yesterday."

"Then there's something wrong somewhere. Your pal 'phoned that you had broken a leg and an arm and he went to your rescue. By the way, he has been gone some time, and the place has been unprotected. Take a look and see if all is well."

Garry swept the territory with the glasses, and found no sign of alarm. This he reported, and then announcing that he was going to try and find Phil, asked if the clerk had any idea of the way Phil had gone.

"Yes, he said that he was going east."

"East? Are you positive?" asked Garry, still more surprised, for Phil knew that he had drawn west in the lots for the search.

"Positive," answered the clerk, and with that Garry had to be contented.

Garry rang off, and readjusting the connecting switch, hustled down the mountain. He searched the cabin for a clue or a note, but Phil had left nothing. Packing his knapsack with more food he made for the river, leaving Sandy again in charge of the cabin.

Garry tried to figure out how Phil had received word of his injuries. He was certain that LeBlanc and Anderson were at the bottom of the ruse, and decided to seek the movie people and borrow the services of a couple of the men and then strike out for the 'phone lines. The trail for the search of Phil must start from there, for that was where the message must have come to the lookout cabin from.

Arriving at the last camp site of the motion picture party, he found a dead pile of ashes. They had broken camp. However, there was a message stuck in a cleft stick firmly planted in the ground near the old campfire. It was addressed to "The Ranger Boys," and simply said that they had gone towards the north for a ways to get their last pictures. The note was signed by the director.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FOREST FIRE

GARRY debated as to what he should do, then figured that the best possible course to pursue was to trail the movie people and enlist their services. The search for Phil might resolve itself into scouring the woods, and he would need every bit of help that it was possible to procure.

He wished that he had the canoe, but he had looked in the cache and found it gone, and from this reckoned that Dick had taken it. There was, therefore, another point in favor of heading north. He might meet Dick on the way back, and if Dick had found the hermit, they might get the old man to aid them in the search. His help would be of inestimable value, for from previous experience they knew that he had wide and complete knowledge of all that region. Garry, of course, did not know that Dick had been successful, he only hoped so.

Garry did not attempt to save himself, so anxious was he to get help. He made his way up the river bank at a brisk pace, sometimes breaking into a trot, and he made excellent time.

When he reached the northern boundary, he found the remains of a campfire, and a trail mark, consisting of a small stone placed on a large one, and another stone near it, indicating north. He remembered having told Andrews, the director, how the scouts in the woods marked a trail, and Andrews had further taken the precaution of leaving a piece of paper with his name on it, between the two stones that formed the trail signal.

There was no other word, and Garry smiled when he saw what Andrews had done. Evidently the

director was quite proud of his first lesson in woodcraft, and was showing it off a little.

It was time to eat, but Garry was too excited to stop and prepare lunch for himself, so great was his anxiousness to get going to the rescue of his chum. He dug a couple of hard biscuits from his knapsack, and munched on these as he walked, stopping to get a drink from the river once or twice. He had no particular trail to follow, so just kept up along the river bank, reasoning that the movie crowd would want some of the river scenery in all likelihood. He found that he was not mistaken in his reasoning, for after a fairly long walk, he found another trail mark. From then on he discovered several.

Evidently the movie people had been making quite a lark of their trail making, for nearly always there was a slip of paper set between the two stones, sometimes with the director's name, sometimes signed by the cameraman, and often by Miss Carter, the leading lady of the company. Garry left the trail marks, only removing the names left there, and substituting the private mark of the boys, a chip placed near the stones. This was in case Dick should follow him, or Phil make his escape in some way, if indeed he had been captured. Of this last Garry was practically certain, for everything pointed to the fact that the lookout had been lured away.

Nothing else would have caused him to stay away from the duty on the mountaintop.

Finally Garry came to a trail mark with a sign indicating that the company had veered in from the river bank and were striking in to the northwest. He followed on, and walked steadily for nearly two hours, crossing a forest stream as he went. Often he questioned his judgment in not starting in search of Phil on his own account, and each time decided that he was using the best sense in seeking additional aid.

This day was also gloomy, and soon he discovered that dusk would be on him in a short time. Indeed it was nearly dark when he heard the sound of voices and laughter in the distance, and as he drew nearer, caught the welcome gleam of a camp-fire.

It was the movie people, or rather it was only Andrews, the cameraman, Miss Carter and her aunt. They hailed Garry with loud cries of welcome, and shouted that he was just in time for supper.

"We had no idea that you would follow us," said Miss Carter. "How did you find us, could you read the trail that we left? We just put the stones there for the fun of it, not expecting that you would be in that vicinity. I told Mr. Andrews that we were just wasting perfectly good efforts in doing it, but

now I am glad that we put them there. But what is the matter, you look so serious."

"Phil has been lured away by a clever ruse, and I not only fear, but know, that he is in the hands of those two arch enemies of ours, LeBlanc and Anderson. I followed on to get your aid, and that of your men," he said, turning to Andrews. "But I don't see the rest of your party."

"No," answered Andrews, "they went on to town, as we had only one or two more scenes to take in the picture that required only the presence of Miss Carter and her aunt, and of course the cameraman and myself. We were just going to camp out along the way home, getting there in the next four or five days, intending to see you boys and say goodbye to you as we went along home. But you can count on us to give you all the help that we can. Just now I suggest that we eat something, for we are hungry, and one cannot do good work on an empty stomach."

This recalled to Garry that he had nothing but a hard biscuit or two since early morning, and he was famished.

They sat about the campfire eating, and were half way through the meal, when Garry sprang to his feet with a look of alarm in his eyes. He had been so filled with the thought that Phil was in danger

that it had excluded all thoughts of other possible trouble.

The others noticed his alarmed look and plied him with questions.

"Look at the sky," cried Garry.

They all gazed upward and saw a reddish gleam against the sky.

The same thought struck each one simultaneously, but Miss Carter was the first one to voice an opinion.

"Oh, Garry! Is the forest on fire?"

"That's just what it is," said Garry grimly. "That accounts for its getting dark so quickly to-night. It wasn't darkness alone, but the pall of smoke. I'm a fine Ranger not to have noticed or thought of that long before now."

"What shall we do, is there any danger to us?" inquired Miss Carter's aunt apprehensively.

"Just for the minute we won't do anything until I take a survey and see what our position is at the present," Garry answered as he threw off his knapsack.

"How are you going to 'make a survey' as you call it in the dark?" asked Andrews.

"Simplest thing in the world. I'm going to climb that giant pine there, which will enable me to see for some distance, and find out where the fire is and

how near it is to us. After that we can decide on the best thing to do."

The others looked at the great tree that ran up from the ground twenty feet or more before there was ever a branch.

"You don't mean to say that you can climb that tree?" asked Andrews incredulously.

"Surest thing you know," answered Garry, as he rummaged through the knapsack in search of his wire. The others watched him as he made his coil around the tree, and then stepped inside of it and began to climb as has been described in another chapter.

He made quick time in the ascent, Andrews flashing an electric torch to help him in his progress up the big trunk. All breathed a sigh of relief as he finally negotiated the place where the boughs began. From then on it was only a matter of a short time before he was at the top of the tree.

His heart fell as he looked from his vantage point. From the north, and not so very far away, a monster forest fire was raging down on them. It would require speed and skill if they were to get to safety before the flames enveloped them. He made the descent to the ground in great haste, climbing out on the bottom bough, and then swinging to the ground from the end of the limb.

"We must make tracks out of here as quick as

we can. The fire will be on us in no time. You probably have no idea of the extreme speed with which the flames sweep through a forest. Pine and spruce are just as though gasoline had been poured on them on account of the resinous sap. Pack up only what is absolutely essential or valuable to you, for we will have to travel fast, and weight is to be considered. Don't bother about your food supplies, for if we get caught by the fire we won't need them ever, and if we get out we can supply you at the cabin. Now speed, speed, that's what we must have."

"I'll dispense with the food," said the cameraman. "I must take my camera. It is too valuable to lose." He ran and got it as he spoke.

"O. K., take your camera, but I would advise you to throw away the tripod, that will cut some of the weight," said Garry. He himself slipped his pack on his shoulders without emptying it of any of its contents. It contained some food, and the precious wireless outfit, besides certain things that might come in useful before the night was over.

In a short time all was in readiness for the departure. Garry carefully stamped out the fire from force of habit, although a minute after he realized that a mighty roaring furnace would soon pass over that spot, making the puny campfire sink into indescribable insignificance.

"Now stick close and follow me," he directed the others, as he set off towards the southeast.

"Hadn't we better go directly to the river?" asked Andrews. "That seems to be the only point of safety."

"No indeed, the fire is coming straight at us, and if we went at right angles to its path, it would overtake us soon. The only hope lies in a long slanting course that will eventually bring us out at the river bank. It is possible by doing that, to keep always ahead of the fire."

They ran through the dark woods, sometimes stumbling, sometimes tripping over a projecting root. The fact that two women were with them made it hard, as they could not make the speed that Garry and the men could have made alone. Garry guided his course by Andrews' compass, keeping a watch on it by means of the electric torch.

In the distance they could already hear the rumble of the approaching holocaust. Suddenly Garry halted in his tracks. He cast a frightened eye at the sky. Then he said quietly, so as not to unduly alarm those he was trying to save:

"We'll have to waste a couple of minutes while I take another survey."

Picking a tree, he made ready almost in an instant to scale it. Never again would he make the speed in the ascent that he made that time, for he

knew that there was now a fight for life on the way, if he was to find his apprehensions true when he arrived at the top of the tree.

His heart sank as he reached the top and gave one look. To the north he could see the flames bearing down on them steadily and mercilessly. But that was not all.

Coming up from the south was another fire!

He slid down the tree, from bough to bough, skinning his hands as he did, but so great was the excitement that he did not notice it.

When he reached the ground, he said as quietly as he could:

"Don't be too alarmed now, but there is not the slightest chance of our reaching the river. There is another fire coming towards us from the south. We are between two fires, just as though we were in the jaws of a mammoth vise!"

The women were silent, and Andrews said grimly:

"Looks as though we were done for, but let's die fighting. Let's go on towards the river. We might make it."

"We'd never get there," declared Garry. "There is just one chance left to us. Follow me and don't get separated. Watch your steps and don't stumble. Make every minute count."

Then to the surprise of the others he started

directly south, straight towards the jaws of flame that would soon be on them from that direction. But he knew what he was doing every minute. He had estimated hastily about the position they were in. This was fairly easy for him, for he had spent many an hour on the patrol estimating distances and judging direction.

He knew there was only one spot of safety in that fiery furnace now, and it was to this point that he was leading his charges with all speed possible. Garry's objective was the brook he had passed on the way to where he had found the motion picture group camped.

CHAPTER XXII.

SAVED!

ON and on they ran, progress becoming harder each moment, for the air was beginning to be heavy with smoke, and breathing was becoming a task. Garry judged that the brook was still half a mile away. He directed his course so that it slanted inland again, for he did not know the exact course of the little stream, but figured that he would cut into it sooner by taking that course, since it would

probably take a slanting direction from north to east.

Their breath came in gasps, and the two women were sobbing from the awful strain. Andrews and the cameraman were helping them, while Garry led the way. He too was suffering, not only from the strain but from the nervous excitement of knowing that on his efforts depended not only his own life but those of the four who were blindly pinning their faith in him.

At last he gave a shout of joy and triumph. They had reached the brook. The point that they had reached was surrounded slightly by brush.

"Now there isn't a minute to lose, dash into that brook and get your clothes thoroughly soaked," he cried to the others, leading the way. This they did, the cameraman, even in the face of danger, thinking of his valuable and precious camera, and holding it out of the water. The brook was no more than three feet deep at that point, but by crouching down they managed to soak themselves till they were dripping.

"Take off your coats and let them get good and wet. You will want them to wrap around your head when the fire reaches us, as it will in a few minutes now."

Providence had favored them in guiding their footsteps to this particular spot, for the trees had

thinned out a bit leaving a little clearing on either side of the brook.

Knowing that he had only a matter of moments left, Garry worked as he had never worked before. Snatching his hatchet from his belt, he proceeded to cut away the brush for a few feet either way, directing Andrews and the cameraman to carry it down stream a few feet. He did this so that when the flames passed them, there would be little or nothing to catch afire and hinder their chances of escape.

The roaring of the mighty flames was terrible now. Thick acrid smoke rolled in billows towards them, making them gasp and cough.

"Wind your wet coats around your heads. It will keep the smoke out of your lungs and eyes," said Garry, shouting at the top of his strength to make his voice heard above the awful din of the roaring conflagration.

As he talked he slashed at the ground with his hatchet, making a deep hole, tearing away the dirt with his fingers. Not knowing why, both the cameraman and Andrews aided in this, knowing that Garry was doing it for a purpose. In less time than it takes to tell they had dug a sizable hollow, and then the cameraman perceived what it was for. Putting the knapsack, with its valuable radio 'phone outfit, and the camera in the hollow, they covered it

with the dirt. This would give it protection from burning, dropping embers and flying sparks.

Hardly had they done this when the flames burst into their immediate vision. They crouched in the brook up to their necks, holding their wet jackets around their heads. There was only one danger now, and that was that a falling tree would crash down on them. The spot, however, seemed to have been made to order to save their lives, for not only was there a sort of clearing there, but the banks shelved up slightly, so that had a tree trunk fallen directly across the brook, it would not crush them down.

The forest sounded as though someone were having a magnificent Fourth of July. The pines snapped like giant cannon crackers. Trees burst into flames, and finally the fire swept over them. Hot embers, parts of burning branches, flying splinters of flaming wood dropped into the brook all around them, and in fact on them, but they ducked constantly under water, keeping the jackets wet and thus protecting their heads. Also the wet cloth around their heads enabled them to breathe, the soaking clothes acting as a sort of a filter for the acrid, pungent smoke.

Differently from what Garry had expected, the fire that passed over them was not the one that was sweeping down from the north, but the one coming

up from the south. Evidently the wind was strongest from that direction.

At last after several minutes, the fire had swept over them. The heat had been intense, and still was, for that matter, so they stayed in the brook. Burning trunks and branches were still all about them, but the danger was past.

Finally they stepped out of the brook, and the nervous strain being too much, Miss Carter's aunt fainted. A liberal dash of cold water soon brought her to, and then Garry unearthed his knapsack, and finding his first aid kit that had been given by the druggist in the boys' home town before they started out to become Rangers, drew out a small bottle of aromatic spirits of ammonia and gave her some. This strengthened her for the time.

"What is the next step, now?" inquired Andrews.

"We had better wait here for the time being. The ground is hot, and there are still burning trees, and progress would be slow and dangerous. Here we have water to drink, and by morning we can have a bite to eat and start for our cabin."

Garry wondered where the fire from the south had started. There came to him the suspicion that the two fires had been deliberately started, and he wondered if he was right in thinking that LeBlanc and Anderson were at the bottom of the disastrous

conflagrations. He did not know then that he had hit on only half of the truth.

The young Ranger wondered if the flames had swept through his father's property. If they had, the cabin was probably a total loss for the second time, and there would be no movie company to help them erect a new one in the short time they had accomplished the other in.

Suddenly the wind veered, and the great rain drops began to splash down on them. In a few minutes the very heavens seemed to open and a cloudburst followed.

Garry breathed a great sigh of relief. Now the danger was done, and the flames could not spread over a great area, destroying thousands of dollars worth more of timber.

There was a second good from the rain. It would put out the burning logs and trees and cool the ground so that they could get a start for home. Exhausted as they all were, they could none of them sleep, and they held a council and decided to make for the river bank, taking it easy on the way. At any rate it would be better than trying to sleep in the pouring rain.

They slouched on through the night and rain, which gave no sign of letting up for some hours. Finally they reached the river bank. By this time, all

were ready to rest, despite the raging elements, and huddled under a tree, for this section had escaped the fire, how, they did not know.

All of a sudden, Andrews pulled from his hip pocket a vacuum bottle.

"Here's something that will give us a taste of warmth. I had forgotten it in the wild hours we have just passed through. I filled this from the coffee pot back where we were camping when you broke up the supper with the announcement that the forest was on fire, Garry. There isn't a great deal, but it will warm us up a trifle."

The warm coffee was more than acceptable and served to cheer them immensely. They slept in fitful dozes through the few remaining hours of the night, and as dawn broke the rain ceased.

"Now for the cabin, and a warm fire and food, then we must get under way to search for Phil," for the trying times had driven from them completely the thought of Phil. Garry would have liked to get on the search immediately, but he knew that unless the women, and the men for that matter, were gotten to where they could have warmth and food and sleep, that the exposure might be fatal to them.

Down along the bank they went, and as they reached a point below the boundary of the Boone

land, Garry was overjoyed to find that the fire had not touched the property at all. Evidently it had been started at a point just above the northern boundary. It was a puzzle that Garry could not find the answer to, but he decided not to worry and to let time tell the answer to the riddle.

After a half a day's weary walking, cold and shivering, they reached the cabin. Miss Carter and her aunt dropped exhausted on the bunks, while Garry rummaged for food supplies to make a hot meal. Sandy was not there, and there was a bed of coals, so Garry decided that Dick must have returned and was probably now on the mountaintop.

After he had cut bacon and put the coffee on to boil, he went outside and fired his rifle three times. In a few seconds he heard three shots in answer, and knew that one of his chums was on the lookout.

"One of he boys is up there, and will probably be down in a few minutes, and then we will find out perhaps something of what has been going on lately around here. I hope it is Phil who is up there, but fear not, it is probably Dick," Garry told the men as he hastened the preparations for the meal. Soon they were all eating with gusto, and the fire and the food did wonders with the morale of the party.

"Now the next thing is to build a roaring good fire outside where we can dry off and get a rest, and let the ladies have the cabin," announced Garry.

"We'll all have to get a little rest or we'll be dead by nightfall after our exciting night. Whoever is on the mountaintop will be down shortly now, and he can stand guard, for the events of the past few days have been such that it seems to me it would be folly to have all of us asleep and off duty."

He had no sooner finished speaking when he heard a hallo from outside the cabin and recognized Dick's voice. The fat youth came rushing outside the cabin, surprised mightily at seeing the movie people there.

His first words were:

"Garry, I guess I get the prize. I've found the old hermit!"

Both the boys began to put questions to each other, until finally Garry called out:

"Say, we're beating all around Robin Hood's barn and not getting anywhere. Suppose we tell our stories in logical order. First have you seen Phil?"

Dick was surprised. "No, I thought he was gone off with you on account of the fire when I got here and found him gone."

This was the signal for Garry to tell him the entire story of his past three days, from the time he left the cabin until he had returned less than an hour ago.

"And," he concluded, what I would like to know

is the origin of those two fires each from a different direction."

"I can give you the answer as to one of them when I finish my story," responded Dick, and so while an interested audience listened, he told of the finding of the hermit.

"We talked for a long time, and I tried to get him to come home with me, but he wouldn't. Said now that he knew one of us and all about the other two he would soon come to pay us a visit. So I started for home, and he guided me on a shorter cut through the woods for a ways, then gave me directions and I started for home. I was cutting down through and had almost reached the northern boundary, when the sky seemed suspicious. I climbed a tree and saw what seemed certain was smoke in the distance. So I waited a bit and it got mighty dark, and up the tree I went again and sure enough there was some fire to the north. I knew it would sweep down through your Dad's property and beyond, and decided that there was only one thing to do, and that was to back-fire. Fortunes seemed to be with me, for at that moment the wind veered and came from the south, and I knew that I could start a whale of a back-fire that would sweep to the north and meet and kill the other. Of course I never had any idea that you, Garry, or our friends here were in the forest there

and that you would get caught between the two fires. Fortunately you escaped all right, and our section here was saved, for otherwise we would have lost lots of timber before the rain came.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PHIL IS RESCUED

Now that we have followed Dick and Garry to the end of their separate adventures, let us go back and see how Phil fared. We left him chained to the tree, with the merciless laughter of LeBlanc and Anderson ringing in his ears.

Phil was in a quandry. He looked the situation over, and wondered by what means he was going to free himself. Had it been a rope he could have in time worked himself free, even if he had had to devote hours to chafing the rope against the tree until it wore through and parted.

But the chain was different. It was fitted snugly around the tree and locked there, and also around his foot. He unlaced his shoepack and attempted to draw his foot out, but the chain had been drawn too tightly, almost to the point where it cut into the leather so that this was impossible.

His captors had carefully searched his pockets before they had left him, and he had absolutely nothing in the way of a weapon or tool of any kind. Had they left him his knife, he could have cut away the leather, or if he had his axe, he could have cut through the tree and thus released the chain. But they had taken his axe, knife and rifle.

He searched around on the ground trying to find a stone, with which he might smash the padlock. But there was none. Everything seemed to be in favor of the vicious captives.

By this time he was hungry and thirsty. Staring him tantalizingly in the face was the knapsack, just out of reach. He spent minute after minute trying to stretch out and get it, but it was just too far out of reach. He would have given everything he possessed to have had Sandy there at that moment, for the intelligent Airedale would have dragged the knapsack to him on the first command.

Then he tried to tear away the leather shoepack with his hand, but only succeeded in tearing his fingers and breaking his finger nails. The shoepack was made of the toughest leather, made to withstand long months in the woods.

While he was devising ways and means to extricate himself, night came, and he was forced to give up his labors. He was fearfully thirsty by this time, hungry too, but the thirst was the worst. He

remembered stories he had read of men lost in the western deserts without a drop of water. Never until now had he realized what they suffered. And there, almost within reach, was his canteen. It was maddening, tantalizing.

Then with a start, he realized that there was another danger, that of wild animals, and he had nothing to protect himself. There would be danger of only one animal, and that would be a civet cat or wildcat, but that would be as bad as a lion in the African jungles.

Finally, thirsty, overpoweringly thirsty, he fell asleep. He woke from dozens of dreams, all of water. He could see it in every manner, purling brooks, great rivers, and dripping faucets. Had he been able to take a drink, he could have gone longer without feeling the need of it so much, but the very fact that he couldn't have any made him twice as thirsty.

Fortunately he was unmolested through the night by any kind of animal. He could hear the owls hooting in the distance, and the mournful "glunk, glunk" of a tree toad.

About midnight he fell into a deep slumber, and awoke only with the dawn. In the morning another idea seized him. Why had he been such a fool as not to have thought of it the night before? He could have spread his handkerchief on the ground,

and it would have gathered a few precious drops of dew, not much, but enough to slake the awful thirst for a moment.

He searched his pockets again in the hope that he could find a stray match with which to start a fire, for the thought occurred to him that he might then set fire to the tree and so free himself. But he could find not a single match. There was a bit of a broken stick on the ground, and he tried to start a fire at the foot of the tree Indian fashion, but he had no knife to point the stick or to bore a small hole in which to twirl the stick. After nearly two hours he gave it up. It almost seemed that he would have to resign himself to his fate and die of thirst and hunger in the woods.

Then a great loneliness seized him, and he began to talk aloud, just for the sake of hearing his own voice.

"Let me, see," he mused. "This is the third day now since the search for the hermit started, and the boys ought to get back some time today. I wonder what they will think when they find me missing, and if they will look for me."

This thought cheered him up considerably, for he knew his pals and knew they would search for him till they found him. The only trouble was that it might be days before they could reach him. He upbraided himself bitterly for his carelessness in not

leaving a note behind him telling them where he had gone and why.

He knew he should not get discouraged, that there ought to be some way out of the fix that he was in. If he could get at that water canteen and his knapsack. With something to eat and drink he felt that he could tackle any problem.

Then the Big Idea came to him.

In a trice he had taken off his belt, and was examining the buckle. It was an old belt, one that he had used for more than three years as a part of his baseball uniform. He noticed that the buckle was of a very cheap metal, and that it was considerable worn.

He began to rub it against the steel chain that he was made captive with, and after diligently rubbing the two metals together, was delighted to find that it had made an impression on the cheap metal of the buckle. He rubbed and rubbed, occasionally trying to hit it squarely against the chain or the padlock. Finally after nearly eight hours work, hard discouraging work, he managed to part the buckle.

Using every ounce of his strength, he pulled it apart a little, and now he had a serviceable hook. Casting it time and time again at the canteen, he finally managed to catch the hook on a portion of

the strap. He gave it a sharp yank, and pulled, but it slipped off. The next time he failed again.

"Three times and out," he muttered and cast again.

This time the improvised hook caught and in less than no time, he was taking a long, satisfying swig. The water revived his drooping spirits marvelously, and he felt that it would only be a question of time before he would be free.

His next act was to cast several times until he finally hooked onto his knapsack. This was a harder job, because the pack was heavy, and the hook slipped frequently. At last, however, success rewarded his efforts, and he drew the pack toward him.

He rummaged through the pack first digging out some food. He found he had nothing but some spiderbread and a small tin of beef that he could eat without cooking, although there were bacon and materials for more bread there. Fortunately there was a patent opener on the beef tin, else he would have had to eat only dry bread, since he had nothing else with which he could open the tin.

His hunger satisfied, he searched for his pliers, thinking to be able to cut or mash the padlocks with them, but they were not in the pack. Either he had forgotten them or LeBlanc and Anderson had filched them when they searched through the pack.

This was a setback, for there was nothing in the knapsack that he could use to force the locks or break the chain with.

Then his eyes lighted on the wireless 'phone outfit that he had unpacked and laid out while he was hunting for something to eat. Here was salvation at last.

With eager, trembling fingers he set up the light aerial and prepared his transmitter, then he began to call, frequently tuning up to get the right waves.

He was almost about to give up the task when he heard a welcome voice calling hello.

It was Dick.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PHIL IS RESCUED

DICK had gone back to the lookout after he had heard the story of Garry and told his own. He kept constant watch on the countryside, looking for signs of activity of any sort. There was no danger of fire, for the great rain had effectively wet down the woods so that it would take two or three days to dry them out to such an extent that there would be a danger of fire.

Just as a whim, and without expecting to hear

anything, he opened the key and put on the telephone headpiece of the wireless. For a long time he heard nothing, and his thoughts were wandering. He kept the headpiece on as it was not uncomfortable.

Suddenly he heard a buzzing, and an indistinct murmur. He snapped into attention and listened, tuning up slightly in an attempt to make the sounds plainer. At last the proper tuning point was reached and he heard a voice. As we know, it was Phil.

"Hello, old stockingfoot, we thought you were captured and held prisoner and everything by the enemy. Where are you, and where have you been?" Dick asked. He was sure now that Phil had just gone out on a hunt, or perhaps the fire had drawn him out. He was much surprised at Phil's answer.

"That's just what has happened to me. I am a captive chained to a tree somewhere to the northwest of the farthest 'phone line. From the position of the sun today, I judge it is northwest by north. Come along as soon as you can and bring something hot to drink and something to eat and something to break the padlocks that keep me chained to the tree. I am cold and wet from that rain, last night."

"We'll be on the way in no time and then we have lots of news to tell you. I'll cut off now and go and get Garry and we'll be off to your aid in a few minutes," said Dick. Then he snatched off the

headpiece, and hustled down the mountainside. He came dashing in on the others as they lay near a campfire, and wakened Garry, who had been catching a short nap.

"Snap out of it, Garry. I've just had a message on the wireless from Phil. He is chained to a tree over in the next section and can't get loose by himself. He wants a hot drink and something to eat, but we can make that for him when we get there. The principal thing is to start out. We'll have to keep on going in the dark, so we had better get some pine knots that we can use as torches. I don't know any of the details, but he was seized by our friends, LeBlanc and Anderson, and chained in some way to a tree. He must have been able to set up his wireless, and I don't know how long he has been trying to reach us, for I didn't bother to ask many questions. Sorry you can't have more sleep, but you can make up for it tomorrow,—sleep the clock around if you want to. Let's go!"

His words had awakened Andrews and the cameraman, and they wanted to join in the search, but Garry vetoed it for two reasons. First they would have to make double speed all the way, and were better able to travel the woods in the dark, also Garry, in view of past circumstances, did not want to have Miss Carter and her aunt left to the mercy of any prowlers that might be around.

Both the director and the cameraman saw the force of his argument, and reluctantly agreed that he was right and that they would remain at the cabin. Also they were planning on leaving the big woods on the morrow, hence would need all the rest that they could get.

The boys took Sandy along with them, in the hopes that he might be able to help them shorten their search, though of course they did not expect to be able to go direct to the spot where Phil was, especially in the night. Sandy could not trail Phil, for the rain would have destroyed all scent.

Garry and Dick slung their packs on their shoulders, and bade the movie people good-bye, for they were to start in the morning, and it was improbable that the boys would be back by that time. They left their city addresses with the boys, and made them promise they would come and visit the studio the first time they were in New York. This the boys promised.

They cut diagonally through the woods, heading for the 'phone wire on the westerly side of the section.

They had no particular idea as to just what point to start from when they got there, and decided to go direct to the end of the line, and then head due northwest. Phil had said that he was northwest by

north, and they figured that the course they would pursue would be as near as they could guess.

The boys reached the 'phone wire and walked along, following it. There was a moon out, and it cast a pale, uncertain light through the thick trees in spots, but it was sufficient for the chums to see the occasional gleam of the wire, and thus hold true to their course.

When Garry and Dick reached the spot where Phil had been made captive, a clue was found that made them alter their intention to go to the end of the line, and it was this change in their plans that enabled them to find their captive chum in much quicker time. Sandy had been ranging around on little private expeditions of his own, for he seemed to sense that there was something wrong, and frequently he was given the command, "Find Phil," by Garry.

When they were at home, this was a game that they had often played, and so perfect had Sandy become at trailing his boy friends, that there were few times when he had failed to resurrect them from whatever hiding place they had chosen, no matter how difficult of access it was.

Several times they had been obliged to halt and whistle for the big Airedale, but like the well trained dog that he was, he came running in answer to the whistle immediately.

Sandy was at this moment on one of his little trips, and as the Ranger Boys were tramping along, they heard a sharp, excited barking from Sandy. They ran to the spot, guided by his bark, and found him standing over a glove. It was Phil's beyond a doubt.

As a matter of fact, Phil had dropped it inadvertently at that particular spot, but Garry and Dick immediately decided that he had dropped it for the express purpose of guiding them to where he was being taken.

Hence they agreed that the best step was to follow Phil's northwest by north direction. They lighted one of the torches they had prepared before the start of the searching expedition, and, guided by the compass, struck off the 'phone line trail.

Occasionally they fired a shot from a rifle, and kept up an incessant shouting all of the while.

"This shouting may draw the enemy on us," suggested Garry.

"Then it's a chance that we must take. There is no other way we can find Phil, for when he hears our shouts or shots, he can answer," replied Dick.

"Right you are, let her go," and he concluded with a long, loud halloo.

So they pounded on, often going off the trail for a half a mile or so on either direction, for they by

no means expected to walk directly to the tree that held their chum a prisoner.

The flaring torch cast weird, flickering shadows ahead of them, and the entire scene was an uncanny one.

"That rain did a good turn and a bad one, didn't it, Garry?" asked Dick.

"Sure did," answered Garry. "It saved a good many thousand dollars' worth of property by putting out that fire, and also it spoiled any chance of Sandy's picking up Phil's scent."

After each rifle shot and each shout, they paused for a minute or two and listened intently for some answer, but none came. Finally they agreed that night searching was impossible. Garry was almost played out, due to the combination of loss of sleep and strain that he had been under during the forest fire, and so they decided to rest until dawn, and continue the search with the first light of morning.

As was usual, since the many adventures they had had since coming to the Big Woods, a watch was set. Garry took the first turn at sleeping, after instructing Dick to call him in an hour so that he could stand sentry for sixty minutes. He unrolled his blanket, and borrowing Dick's, laid down and was asleep almost in an instant.

Dick did not obey Garry's behest to call him at the end of an hour, as he felt fresh and wide-

awake, so it was not until almost an hour before dawn that he finally aroused his sleeping chum.

Garry sprang to his feet when wakened and inquired the time.

"It will be dawn in about an hour," replied Dick. "You stand now and I'll snatch forty winks before we get going. Start breakfast before you call me, and we'll get a good start."

Garry remonstrated with his friend for not calling him to do his share, but Dick laughed and ended the argument by rolling up in the blankets and dropping off to sleep.

As soon as the first faint light of dawn came, Garry started a fire and put the coffee on to boil. He did not need to call Dick, for as soon as the aroma of the coffee penetrated the air, he was wide awake.

Breakfast was a hasty affair, and then the search was again started. Despite their numerous deviations, they felt that they were still on the trail, for care had been taken to get back to it whenever they had left it.

They felt that they must be near where Dick was, and so they redoubled their shouting and rifle shots. Sandy, as usual, was on several little private quests of his own, returning each time in answer to a whistle from one of the boys.

At last they heard a faint shouting. Garry at

once fired his rifle three times, the customary signal used by the trio, and again came the distant answering shout. Both then broke into a run, but their speed was nothing as compared to that of Sandy. With a loud barking, he made a mad dash in the direction of the voice that he heard and recognized as that of one of his friends, long before the boys were sure of whose voice it was.

In a very few minutes they came on Phil, who was trying to ward off the enthusiastic caresses of Sandy. The chums hailed each other with joy, and after a shouted greeting, work was begun on the freeing of Phil.

A few sharp blows of the axe head against the padlock sufficed to smash it, and then Phil was freed of the heavy bear trap chain. Next on the program was a breakfast of hot coffee, smoking hot bacon and spiderbread. Phil suspended with all talking, and devoted himself strictly to the business of eating. He made a clean job of the breakfast, while Garry and Dick jollied him about his appetite.

No time was lost in setting out on the homeward journey, and as they walked, each told of the stirring adventures they had passed through since they saw each other.

Phil was pleased at the fact that the hermit had at last been discovered, and vowed that he wanted

to go and visit him as soon as possible. This he was told was not necessary, since the hermit had promised Dick that he would come to see them at the cabin in the near future.

After more than a half day walk, they reached the cabin, their forest home, and walked into the shack to find Nate and a whiskered individual clad in rough tweeds and heavy walking boots, looking worried and upset.

Nate stared in amazement as he saw Garry walk in minus any broken legs or arms, for of course he did not know of what had transpired since he left Millinocket, or that the broken leg story had been the ruse that drew Phil away from the lookout and to his subsequent capture.

"Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish. Here you are all safe and sound, and here is the doctor that I dragged sixty miles into the woods to set a couple of broken limbs. What is the meaning of all this?"

The old Deputy Ranger was soon put in possession of all the facts, and at the conclusion, broke into a tirade against Anderson and LeBlanc.

"There's no use talking, that precious pair of scoundrels must be put under lock and key. I can't have the whole Ranger service disrupted, and the lives of the deputies in constant danger any longer. We've got to get 'em, and put 'em in jail where they belong!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ESCAPE

"You are right, Nate, they ought to be apprehended, but can you tell us how to go about it? We haven't the slightest idea where they are located, or even if they are in this place or anywhere near here. It hardly seems possible that they would stay around here after starting forest fires, capturing sworn servants of the State, and in general raising all kinds of trouble," questioned Garry.

"Yep, that's what you said a while ago, when LeBlanc first escaped, that he wouldn't dare stay around here after kidnapping little Patty Graham, but he seems to have dared to stay long enough to do a tolerable amount of mischief. I swan if I don't go to the Sheriff and have a lot of my fire fighters sworn in as special deputy sheriffs and send a posse through the woods until they find that pair. I can pick out fifty men that know the wood country like a book, and if they can't find 'em then I'll admit that they are gone," replied Nate heatedly.

As they were talking, they heard someone outside of the cabin calling, "Oh, Dick, Oh, Dick."

"By George, there's the hermit," cried Dick, springing to his feet. He rushed to the door and went out. Soon he came back, bringing the hermit with him, although the old white-haired man seemed to come rather reluctantly. Dick introduced the others to him, but he seemed ill at ease, shrank back into one of the bunks, where he sat listening as the others talked. The little group in the cabin seemed to recognize that he was uneasy, and so did not intrude on him.

They resumed the conversation about the capture of the two malefactors, when the hermit said something in a strange tongue. The doctor looked surprised and uttered in amazement, "By Jove, the man is talking in Latin! He is saying some old proverb, speed and surprise as the chief factors in capturing the enemy. It is from Cæsar's Gallic wars. I recognize it from my old school days."

"Of course I know Latin," interrupted the hermit in a nettled tone. "And I know something else. I know where this LeBlanc and his friend are. I know everything that goes on in these woods, and what the animals say and the flowers."

The old man was plainly a little bit off his mental balance, but his past performances seemed to

warrant his assertion that he knew most of what was going on in the woods.

"Where are they?" asked Nate excitedly.

"I won't tell you, I won't tell anybody anything except Dick," answered the old fellow in a querulous tone.

For some unaccountable reason he had taken a strong fancy to Dick.

Garry recognized this fact, and gave Dick a nod that meant to ask where the culprits were. This Dick did, and the old man made a ready response to his question.

"They are about ten miles from my home, up on my land. I own all that land up there, and I can take you to where they are right away, if you want to go."

A short conference was held, the hermit speaking only to Dick. It was finally agreed that a good night's rest would be had before setting out.

Nothing would do but that the doctor join in the hunt.

"I haven't known anything as exciting as this since I used to go miles and miles into the woods to patch up and fix wounded lumberjacks after one of the big timber wars that we used to have so often a few years ago. Count me right in on this little posse you have organized."

The hermit would not remain in the cabin for the

night, preferring to sleep in the open, but he promised to be on hand at dawn to lead them to where the men were in hiding.

When the morning came, the hermit was there, true to his word.

Rifles were carefully examined, and the doctor was given an extra pistol that Nate carried. On the way, the hermit explained that they were in a cave, as it seemed that there were three or four in the rugged country where the old white-haired hermit made his home.

They ploughed steadily on, making better time than usual, for the hermit seemed to know every step of the way, and so no time was lost in casting about for directions.

At noon they halted for lunch, and were about to cook the usual bacon, when the hermit silently drew from the capacious pouch that he carried slung over his shoulder a half a dozen squirrels, which he had evidently intended to be a present for the boys. They made an excellent lunch of the tender, juicy squirrel meat, and then took up the march again.

"We will have to stay here for the night," said the hermit, as he led them to a spot near a spring of clear, cold water. Tomorrow morning early we shall come to the cave."

"He had overcome some of the shyness, and now addressed all of the members of the little party, but

when he pointed out anything of interest as they walked, it was always Dick that received the first information.

Camp was made for night and the usual watch was maintained, but since there were six members in the party the watches were short, the hermit taking his turn the same as the others.

Next morning the hermit took the lead again after breakfast, and, true to his word, it was not long before they approached a rocky hill. It was higher than the one on which the lookout cabin used by the boys was located, and there were several small, craggy ravines.

"We will have to approach carefully, because they may be keeping watch," said the hermit.

"I hope they are not," said Nate, "for then we can surprise them and our force of numbers will make capturing them easier."

They proceeded cautiously up the hill, and when within a few hundred feet of their objective, were stopped by the hermit.

"You see that little pile of boulders? Back of those is the cave where they are staying."

"We can crawl up there and get to the mouth of the cave, and they will have no chance to take pot shots at us," said Nate, who was in command of the party by virtue of his position as Deputy Ranger.

All was going well, when something occurred that made all their plans go askew.

For once during a life of good behavior, Sandy committed an unpardonable sin. He had been told by Garry to keep quiet, and so thoroughly had this command been drilled into him, that he knew absolutely what was required of him.

He must have gotten a scent of LeBlanc, for suddenly, without warning, he broke into a series of sharp yelps.

Less than a minute after they saw a form appear at the mouth of the cave, which they recognized as LeBlanc's, and then a shot came whistling over their heads.

"Duck for cover, everyone!" shouted Nate.

His words were hardly needed, for a second shot sent them scurrying behind trees and boulders for protection.

"Drat that tarnal dog. He's sure gone and spilled the beans for fair now. We won't have a chance to get at those fellows now, for they could hold off a regiment provided they had sufficient ammunition, and I don't doubt that they have a plenty." He turned to the hermit. "Is there any way that we can get into that cave from the top?"

"No. You see it is set in the cleft of that little ravine. It was probably formed by a great snow-

slide or avalanche, and I don't know of any opening."

"Well, seems like we were up a stump then," said Nate, in a tone of deep disgust. "Surely, you're a fine dog, but you did put your foot into it that time."

The dog seemed to realize that he had been at great fault, for he stood with his tail between his legs. Then he instinctively turned to the hermit, for he knew that he would get no word from his boy friends, who would punish him in that way for his bad day's work.

The old hermit patted him on the head, and said:

"Never mind, old boy. 'The best laid plans o' men and mice, Aft gang alee.'"

"First he talks Latin and then he quotes Burns," whispered the doctor to Garry. He is the most remarkable specimen of hermit I have even seen or heard of."

"Yes," Garry whispered back. "There is certainly some great mystery about him. Perhaps some day we shall find it out."

"Well, now that the day's work is spoiled, there is only one thing we can do, and that is wait until night comes, and either rush the cave, or crawl up and smoke them out."

This was agreed on as the best thing to do, and the party waited for nightfall. At last the tedious

day came to an end. There was someone always on watch to see that the captives in the cave (for captives they were) did not spring some surprise on them. The two in the cave also kept a sharp watch, as a whistling shot once in a while reminded them.

Black night finally came, and with it a constant fusillade of shots from the mouth of the cave. Evidently LeBlanc and Anderson deemed this the best way to keep an attacking party off.

At last Nate announced that they must proceed to the smoking out process.

"We will have to take a chance on the bullets, but they seem to be firing high, just to show us they are ready. Good luck seems to be with me in one way today, for I have in my pocket a piece of quick burning fuse that I was using t' other day to show some men how to dynamite trees to stop a forest fire. One or two of us can crawl up with a lot of brush, while the others cover our advance with a steady rifle fire, and that will keep those two rascals well inside the cave. Then the fuse can be lighted and soon they will be smoked out, since our friend Mr. Hermit, here, says it's a powerful small cave."

The boys immediately insisted that the honor be theirs of crawling to the mouth of the cave with the tinder and brush.

Nate finally consented, although he felt that he

should do it himself, as he did not want to lead the young Rangers into any too great danger, but he was unable to withstand their importuning.

The rifle fire still came from the cave above them, and after the boys had prepared their brush piles, and removing their shoes, started up towards the cave, the others in the posse opened fire on the cave, firing high of course, in order that the boys might not be hit.

After a long, cautious trip, the brush was piled and the fuse attached so that it would fire a lot of dry tindery material, and the boys returned speedily to the others. The firing on both sides continued, and then was silence on the part of the halfbreed and the treacherous ex-Deputy Ranger.

Soon they could see the flames and smoke from the brush, for some of the brush had been wet at a spring in order to make a denser smoke. Still there was no move from the cave.

"They ought to be coming out to put out the fire, then we could rush them," said Nate. "If they stay there much longer they will be suffocated."

Several minutes elapsed, and then the fire died down, and yet there was no move from the cave.

"Only one thing left. It's dangerous, but no more so than to have them at large. We'll rush the cave," decided Nate.

Carefully instructing the others in the proper

way to conduct themselves during the rush, Nate led the way up to the mouth of the cave.

"Now!" he shouted, and leading the little group, burst into the cave. "Throw up your hands," he shouted. "There are six guns covering you!"

There was no answer, and then Garry bethought himself of the flashlight in his pocket. He brought it out and flashed it around the cave.

An exclamation of dismay and disappointment burst from each one.

The cave was empty.

"Gone. Flew the coop. Disappeared!" ejaculated Nate. "Now how in thunderation did they do it?"

There was absolutely no sign of exit in the cave, although they searched it carefully.

Garry stepped outside and flashed his light about the walls of the little ravine. In a moment the way of escape was clear.

Calling the others, he showed them a rope hanging from a craggy abutment on the top of the wall of the chasm.

"Well I swan! That's how they did it. Bet LeBlanc figured that scheme out. It's all as plain as daylight now," said Nate. "When night fell they threw that rope up there and while one fired his rifle to distract us, the other shinnied up the rope. Then from the top of the wall, he kept firing

while the other climbed up and joined them. When they were both up, they gave a parting salute and disappeared. It would take a hundred men to find them in that honeycomb of rocky hill and woods. Guess all our trouble's gone for nothing," concluded Nate.

"Look," called Garry. "Isn't that a bit of paper or cloth tied to the rope about half way up?"

"Guess it is," answered Nate.

Without any further ado, Garry went hand over hand up the rope, and soon came back with the result of his journey. It was a bandana handkerchief that had been tied there, and in it was a scrap of paper with this derisive message:

"Bye bye, see you in Canada."

"Well, at any rate, there's an end of that pair, although I wished we had caught them," said Webster.

The disappointment and chagrin of the party was great, but there was nothing more that they could do. They camped there for the rest of the night, and in the morning, the hermit trudged off to his own cave, promising to come and see the boys again, and the remainder of the party hiked back to the cabin.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

NATE and the doctor had gone home, and three quiet days ensued for the boys. Garry and Dick made a day patrol, followed by a day of rain, then Phil and Dick went out, leaving Garry in the lookout. They tried the wireless several times, finding to their satisfaction that it worked to perfection.

When they returned that night, Garry greeted them with news.

"Nate telephoned today that he was sending a patrolman and lookout to relieve us, and that we were to bring only our personal belongings and report to him as soon as the others arrived. He wouldn't tell me what it was all about, much as I pressed him. What do you suppose it could be all about? You don't suppose that Nate thinks that we have fallen down on the job, do you?"

"Couldn't be such a thing, he knows better than that," exclaimed Phil. "I am afraid that he has let your father know what has been happening to us, Garry, and your father thinks this neck of the

woods too hot for us. I hope that isn't the case, for we've only been here a little while, and I hate to have them think we are not fit to take care of ourselves."

During the two days that followed, the boys made many conjectures as to the cause of their being called into Millinocket, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion.

On the second day, Garry sat thinking, and suddenly exclaimed:

"Say, fellows, while we have been so busy the last few days, it slipped my mind completely that we have never seen hide nor hair of that bear we captured since Phil turned him loose.

Dick and Phil acknowledged that they, too, had never given the animal a thought. "Guess he must have been too glad to get his freedom to come back," decided Phil, and the others agreed that this was the most probable thing.

"At any rate, we'll tell our successors to take care of him if he does show up," said Garry.

Their successors showed up at the end of the second day. They were grown men, thorough woodsmen, and inclined to josh the boys about their adventures, for they had heard something about them from Nate.

"Guess you boys found it pretty hot up here, didn't you?" asked one. "Well, we won't be both-

ered by LeBlanc or anyone else. LeBlanc knows us, and knows we aren't safe to fool with."

The boys took the joshing good naturedly, and spent some time explaining the territory to the men, the location of the 'phone lines, and where to find the canoe cached where Dick had left it when he went to search for the hermit.

Immediately after receiving Nate's message, Garry had disassembled and packed the wireless, for it was their personal property.

Next morning, they set out for Millinocket, carrying only enough food to last them for the two days they would be on the march. All the rest of their luggage consisted of the wireless, which made a good sized load for each boy.

When they arrived at Millinocket, though it was late at night, they proceeded immediately to Nate's office and found him there.

"Expected you boys would be in tonight," he said, as he shook hands with them. "Kind of wonder what it's all about, don't you?" he inquired shrewdly.

"Yes, we have wondered a bit. We have been afraid that you thought we couldn't hold down the job," replied Garry, speaking for the others as well as himself.

"Ought to know better than that," interrupted

Nate, promptly. "You boys can range for me anytime, so long as I'm in charge of this territory. Now, what you were called in for is this. I have sent a complete story of your activities to the Chief Ranger at Augusta, and he orders you there to receive his special commendation, and I think he has some special work for you."

They passed a pleasant evening with Nate, who took them to his own home to spend the night, and early next morning they were on their way down to Augusta, the capital, or "Gusty," as all Maine natives speak of it.

They had lunch at Bangor, and late in the afternoon arrived at the capital, and proceeded directly to the State House.

They sent in their names to the Chief Ranger, and after a few minutes' wait, were received by him.

"I have heard excellent reports of your work, boys, and I have called you here for two purposes. First to extend to you on behalf of the State Ranger Service, special commendation for your work, and the way you have upheld the traditions of the service. Second, you are to be attached for a time to the Customs service on my recommendation. There has been considerable smuggling going on over the Canadian border, a good many furs, and also we have wind of a gem smuggling plot.

"It may seem strange that I am attaching boys of your age to this service, but it is that very fact that is going to make you valuable. You can go as campers and get, we believe, some valuable information for us. This will all be explained to you by myself and the Customs head.

"Now would you boys like to meet the Governor? I am sure he would see you," concluded the Chief.

All three of the young Rangers expressed their keen delight at the prospect, and so the Chief Ranger conducted them up to the Governor's office.

They were received by the tall, distinguished man who was the Chief Executive of the Pine Tree State.

He shook hands with the boys and then said briefly:

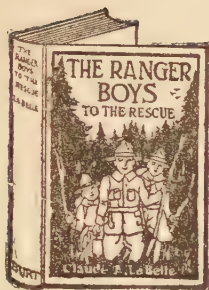
"The Chief Ranger has told me something of what you boys have done and I add my sincere congratulations to his. I am sure it is gratifying to know that you represent the type of boys that we raise in this State that we are all so proud of."

The boys thanked him for his kind words and returned for the conference with the Customs Chief and Head Ranger.

What the outcome of their conference was, and

the stirring adventures that befell them on the Canadian border, where they make new friends, and meet some old enemies, will be told in Volume Three of this series, entitled, "THE RANGER BOYS AND THE BORDER SMUGGLERS."

THE END



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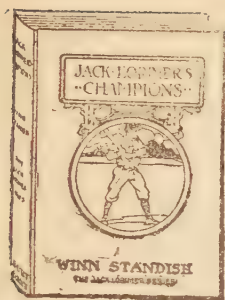
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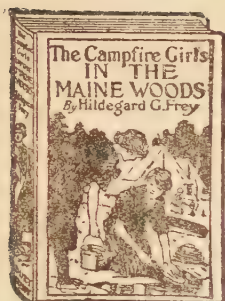
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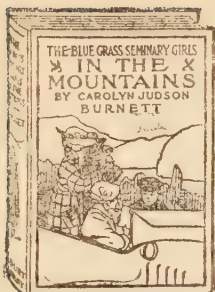
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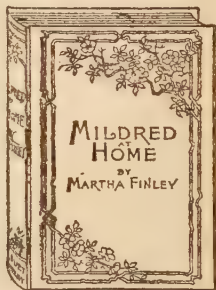
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